BEFORE FICTION

The Ancien Régime of the Novel

NICHOLAS D. PAIGE

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Preface

This book proposes a new history of the novel in France and England in which fiction itself is the primary variable; my account then provides the ground for understanding the fictional status of a series of (mostly) canonical novels from the early French tradition—or, more to the point, for understanding why they may not in fact be fictional. Both the larger narrative and the individual readings are subtended by an approach to the evolution of literary forms that parts company with most work on the novel's history, and this, as much as fiction, is my subject as well.

First, the big picture: I sketch out here a history of fiction. Elaborating and substantially modifying the arguments of a number of specialists of the English novel, I argue that fiction is not at all coterminous with "literature" or what used to be called "poetry," but is a rather recent phenomenon. Saying this, I am not following common modern usage and taking fiction as a synonym for the novel; though the present study is restricted to novels, it is not about their birth. By fiction, I mean something better though more awkwardly captured by the substantive "fictionality," which is to say the peculiar yet for us intuitive way that novels refer to the world: via invented characters and plots, they purport to tell us how people and institutions and abstractions like money or power work. This is peculiar logically: how can writers possibly persuade readers of their view of the world if they are just making up their evidence? More important, it is historically peculiar. For one thing, the type of invention commonly practiced by novelists starting in the nineteenth century has few analogues in earlier times, which accorded little respect to writers dabbling in subject matter entirely of their own creation, and which largely understood the term fiction to designate a form of lying as deplorable as any other. Moreover, openly invented characters were a rarity for a good chunk of the novel's development in France and England: in the late seventeenth century and for almost all the eighteenth, novelists presented themselves as mere editors, and their inventions as real documents or reports. Modern readers

have often looked back on such pretense of literal truth with a certain degree of bafflement, but our present reflex, according to which the real-world existence of the characters we read about matters not a bit, would have proved just as baffling to readers throughout the two preceding millennia.

No doubt there are many valid and useful definitions of fiction and fictionality according to which the above distinctions seem but split hairs: isn't all literary imagining a part of what philosopher Kendall Walton has called the human propensity to "make believe"? And more seriously, perhaps: doesn't Aristotle, in the West's founding document of literary criticism, place the distinction between poetry and history front and center? Such are two main obstacles between us and a history of fiction, but they are far from insurmountable. As we will see, the principal hurdle of the *Poetics* is simply that we read it through our knowledge of what is to come, which is to say, fiction. And though my definition of fiction is undeniably only one of many possible definitions, it has the advantage of enabling us to distinguish between three historical regimes of literary invention in a way we cannot if we just make some "consciousness of fiction" the bedrock of all literary endeavor. The three regimes, which succeed one another in their dominance, are the following. Most of the Western literary tradition since Homer can be understood through the lens of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which described and sanctioned an enduring articulation (not opposition) of poetry and history; according to this model, the poet adds his inventions to the renowned heroes and events of history so as to make a good plot. The second regime starts around 1670 and lasts until roughly the turn of the nineteenth century. During this time, novelists cease posing as Aristotelian poets and instead pretend to offer their readers real documents ripped straight from history—found manuscripts, entrusted correspondence, true stories, and all the rest. Following Barbara Foley, I will be calling this type of novel *pseudofactual*, in that it masquerades as a serious utterance. That the masquerade is almost always patent should not tempt us to confuse it with what happens under the third, properly fictional regime: the pseudofactual pact demanded that readers pretend to regard novels as true, whereas later novelists asked for something quite different—that they accept the writer's inventions as a kind of model of reality. This is how the nineteenth century replaces the old distinction between poetry and history with fiction as we have come to know and practice it.

This narrative provides the context for the bulk of the book, comprised of six case studies illuminating the strange interregnum between Aristotelian poetics and modern fiction, a period during which the omnipresent formal

feature of the novel was pseudofactual posturing. The first two chapters probe the leading edge of the regime via one novel long accepted as a canonical milestone and one that has been completely forgotten. Because of its combination of an invented heroine and a carefully drawn historical setting, Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) can easily be seen as a major step on the road to modern fictionality. In fact, it simply demonstrates that individual works, however successful, need not be signs of wider transformation: the apparently fictional Princess is better understood as a one-time and idiosyncratic twist on the traditional Aristotelian understanding of the poet's use of history. Subligny's forgotten *La Fausse Clélie* (1670), a Frenchified *Don Quixote*, allows me to tackle what has been for many decades if not centuries a basic way of understanding the novel's history—to wit, that the "modern novel" replaces archaic "romance." While similar though not identical divisions were made repeatedly in the period, the novel-romance opposition is not in fact able to account for texts like Subligny's or even Cervantes's. Romance was not "dead" for either writer, it was just in need of updating; and *La Fausse Clélie* constitutes a signal attempt to make romance forms safe for a pseudofactual age.

The subsequent four chapters are devoted to works that stretch the conventions of the pseudofactual regime without—and this is crucial—causing those conventions to crumble in favor of modern fiction. Crébillon's *Les Égarements du coeur et de l'esprit* (1736–38) is the most sustained example of a new novel of manners that imported a model of invention from comedy—comedy, which since Molière had allowed writers to comment on contemporary social "types" without taking aim at specific individuals. But though Crébillon put no energy into bolstering the pseudofactual pretense of his memoir novel and even narrated thoughts in a manner often associated with modern fiction, his experiment, like Lafayette's, did not change the way novels were written. Indeed, pseudofactuality had bright days ahead. The sentimental novel's goal of giving the genre the emotional and moral gravitas of tragedy necessitated a reinvestment in reality: all available theories of aesthetic effect made the audience's belief in the artwork the foundation of emotional experience and moral improvement. This does not mean that writers such as Rousseau and Diderot were naïve about how novels worked. On the contrary, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1762), commonly advanced as the epitome of quixotic fusion between reader and book, is a laboratory for producing an emotion proper to observers who identify with protagonists even as they maintain distance from them. And Diderot's sentimental novels and tales, though often seen as signaling through their irony a fictional consciousness to come, remain thoroughly

and necessarily enmeshed in pseudofactual presuppositions. The final chapter centers on novelistic subgenres that are tailor-made for thinking about aesthetic effects that don't require literal belief—the fantastic and the gothic. But although a work such as Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux* (1772) clearly pushes hard against the governing Horatian dictum of *incredulus odi*—readers reject what they cannot believe—it is no more predictive of the future than any of the other works examined.

The problem of "predictiveness" brings me to the methodological heart of *Before Fiction*. For it is the relation of the individual novels examined in the six chapters to my larger narrative—a narrative of collective behavior—that separates this book from most histories of the novel. Individual works, especially great ones, are usually the data points that permit the literary historian to plot out an evolution. Thus, given the chronological arc of the novels I've chosen, the obvious assumption would be that I am tracing an evolution, and more precisely, that I see these works as bringing fiction into existence. But this is emphatically not the case. *Before Fiction* could not have been titled *The Rise* or *The Invention of Fiction*, since Cazotte, Diderot, Rousseau, Crébillon, Subligny, and Lafayette are not all engaged in the same great project. These writers are not feeling their way through the pseudofactual night toward the bright light of the fictional day. Nor have they intuited some truth about literature—say, Coleridge's unfortunately proverbial "willing suspension of disbelief"—that we all now embrace. None anticipate developments that would only become dominant later, or bears witness to a collective cultural realization. And they do not relay one another: Diderot does not "learn" from his one-time friend Rousseau; Rousseau in turn learns nothing from Lafayette (whom he nonetheless admired). No one stands on anyone's shoulders to get a better look into the future. At the same time, it is not that some other change—the advent of a "concept" of fiction, or of modernity *tout court*—is readable in the works of authors who were extraordinarily sensitive to their transitional moment. Isolated literary works are not signs of anything else; if they were, they would not be isolated.

What, then, can be the broader significance of the novels under study? In a sense, none: they don't add up to anything; they don't register momentous change. But this doesn't mean that they are not instructive. On the contrary, their authors' complex engagement with the problem of novelistic reference in the wake of Aristotelian poetics brings the larger narrative into focus. Most writers of the period, even good and great ones, give no more thought to the pseudofactual posture than, say, a filmmaker in our day who ends up

producing a color feature lasting between 100 and 140 minutes. It's just how things are normally done. The authors under study, meanwhile, scrutinize the problem of how to write literature that doesn't take as its subject matter the heroes of the past. How can novelists refer to their world without writing about people who are actually part of that world? In asking this question, they push at and play with the conventions of the time; in some cases one might even say that they destroy those conventions. But to the extent that this is the right word, their destructions are local: these individuals do not alter collective practice. I will offer, especially in the Conclusion, some thoughts on how collective practice does change—thoughts, because the type of data needed would dictate a different type of study altogether. For the moment it is enough to insist that though we like to view our favorite authors as heroes or at least as paragons of historical acuity, the truth is much more plain: writers are of their time and place, which is to say, bound by a set of practices and rationales that they do indeed transform, but in limited ways, often without wider effect, and certainly not with our unborn needs in mind. By the pressure they put on Aristotelian and pseudofactual conventions, these six novelists may appear to be gesturing in the direction of fiction, but we mustn't give in to magical thinking: the mirage is generated simply by our coming *after* fiction. Lafayette, Diderot, and Rousseau are not so much *agents* of the transformation of Aristotelian poetics into modern fiction as they are *participant-observers* of processes whose momentum—and inertia—outbulks the contributions of individuals, no matter how perceptive or talented. The novel, envisioned as a history of shared practices and forms, would look much the same without the great writers customarily regarded as the motors of generic change.

"Studies in the morphological history of the novel": this would have made an apt if offputting subtitle for a book concerned not with what deeper things novels "reflect" but with how forms evolve. My subtitle as it actually reads demands a couple of qualifications. The first relates to the term I've chosen to designate the three approaches to literary invention—the Aristotelian, the pseudofactual, and the fictional. I attach no particular importance to the word regime itself; it appears, say, in work by Jacques Rancière and François Hartog, but my use does not follow from theirs. (When speaking of these regimes not as time periods but as ways of writing novels, I often call them "modes"—a term that, likewise, is not intended to recall Northrop Frye.) For me, a regime is merely a fairly stable but not monolithic way of thinking about and writing (narrative) literature; as I will take pains to point out, in no sense should it be taken as implying a perceptual or conceptual matrix on the order of Thomas

Kuhn's "paradigms" or Michel Foucault's "epistemes." My subtitle, then, contains some wordplay. On a basic level, "The Ancien Régime of the Novel" means nothing more than "The Novel in the Early Modern Period"; in a more important sense, the novel's Ancien Régime is the pseudofactual regime, the interregnum between Aristotelian poetry and modern fiction.

The second remark concerns the fact that my shorthand carries some baggage better left behind at once. Since only France had an Ancien Régime, it is easy to conclude that my overarching theory of regimes applies to France alone, and that the sociopolitical context of the country explains its novel. The pseudofactual, readers might reason, must have something to do with absolutist monarchy; by extension, perhaps Aristotelian poetics suits the politics of the Classical and feudal ages, while fiction is made possible by the French Revolution. This would be nonsense, however. At most, "Ancien Régime" advertises that the individual works analyzed are French, while hopefully not obscuring the fact that the larger narrative covers the English domain as well. Cultural specificity matters to the novel's history in all sorts of ways too obvious to mention. Nevertheless, and *pace* the many scholars who have explained the novel as first and foremost and necessarily English, *Before Fiction* argues that the problem of novelistic reference was shared because it was the result of a broad breakdown in Western poetic practice.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations and ellipses are my own; italics in quoted sources are not. Without completely modernizing punctuation, I have occasionally modified it for clarity. For economy I typically use last names alone when referring to authors of the period under study; readers needing greater precision of course will find it in the Index.

Introduction: The Three Regimes of the Novel

> One peculiarity of novels when they first arrived in the eighteenth century was that they told new stories rather than recomposing old ones. Their characters were singular; each novel had to introduce its readers to a new world. This has not changed.
>
> —John Mullan, *How Novels Work*

Gottlob Frege's essay "On Sense and Reference," published in 1892, stands at the beginning of modern philosophical interest in fictionality—that is, in the truth status of fictional propositions. Poetry—roughly, what we now call literature—had of course long been seen as a special kind of deceit that, at least for poetry's many defenders, led mysteriously back to the truth. "The truest poetry is the most feigning," says Shakespeare's Touchstone; "The novel establishes its birthright as a lie that is the foundation of truth," writes Carlos Fuentes much more recently; and indeed, the literary ground since the Greeks is strewn with chestnuts such as these.[1] "The history of Western literary theory," as one noted theorist puts it, "can be summed up as a continuous debate on the classical dictum that poets are liars."[2] Frege's interest was nonetheless distinct, for he was interested in semantic questions regarding language's capacity to refer to the world; literary language was a curious subspecies that did not, he argued, refer at all. If we read, in Homer, that "Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while he was sound asleep," we understand the proposition as having a sense even though the proper name Odysseus has no reference in the real world, and thus no truth-value. "In hearing an epic poem . . . apart from the euphony of language we are interested only in the sense of sentences and the images and feelings thereby aroused. . . . Hence it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name 'Odysseus,' for instance, has a reference, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art."[3]

"A matter of no concern to us," perhaps, but would the ancient Greeks have felt the same way? To be fair, Frege's essay is only tangentially concerned with literary reference; it focuses on the way signs in general refer, and Frege, like many early theorists, felt that sharply separating out literature from "natural" forms of discourse clarified the issues.[4] It is therefore not surprising that, as a theory of fiction, Frege's treatment of Homer leaves much to be desired. But one of its shortcomings in particular is shared by more modern and elaborate theories of fiction. That shortcoming is historical. We are welcome to our doubts about Odysseus's reality, or for that matter about Athena's—as were, presumably, the Greeks—but Homer certainly didn't "invent" them in the manner that Balzac invented Old Goriot or Dickens invented Little Dorrit. Epic heroes and the gods were quite simply *attested*: they were authorized by tradition. They may or may not have had reference in Frege's empirical sense, but they didn't need any: they possessed a type of extratextual existence that the protagonists of the typical nineteenth-century novel did not.[5] Which is to say that along with asking what fiction "is," we might also ask if fiction *always* is, in the same way: mightn't calling Odysseus fictional be to mischaracterize Greek practices of poetic invention, and to read the *Odyssey* as if it were a modern novel?

We might offer sympathetic support for Frege's contention that literary protagonists have no reference by limiting it to the nineteenth-century novel—a likely source of the philosopher's conviction in the first place. The difficulty, however, is that substituting a sentence from Balzac or Dickens for Homer's verses leads to new complications: Old Goriot or Little Dorrit may have no reference, but their inventors refer rather insistently to the Paris and London of their day—not only to places, but also to the workings of money and class and institutions. Such reference obviously falls outside Frege's understanding of the term, predicated as it is on the proper name. We could, then, refine Frege's proposal, perhaps noting with John Searle and others that certain fictional genres contain "nonfictional commitments," which is to say, references to known people and places.[6] This type of accommodation does not, however, solve the problem, which I repeat is at bottom historical: unlike ancient epic, the nineteenth-century novel speaks about specific, local, empirical phenomena, but it does so using completely nonexistent characters engaged in actions that never happened. Homer, meanwhile, spoke of legendary people and events, both (we may speculate) because of their intrinsic interest (heroes, by definition, are worthy of being known) and for the moral or ethical lessons they taught (heroes, by definition, are exemplary). Not without reason are we

used to thinking of Western literary history along the lines laid out by Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis*: literature becomes more and more real, more focused on physical reality. But Frege's remark, by its very inadequacy, reminds us that we must also factor in the converse: modern literature at its most splendidly realist is also removed from reality in a way it had never been before. It can talk a lot about history, implicitly or explicitly, but it does not claim to treat the same people and events that historians do. The difference between Homer and the modern novelist is thus not one of degree: the way the texts work, their modes of reference, are simply incommensurable. And if we agree to call the mode of Balzac and Dickens fiction, then Homer did not write fiction.

The *Odyssey* is not fiction? Not a *novel*, granted—even the many scholars who remain divided about the novel's origin can probably agree on that much. But surely fiction and literature as such are coextensive: "All literatures, including the literature of Greece, have always designated themselves as existing in the mode of fiction," writes Paul de Man.[7] Indeed, "fiction" is the innocuous term used when generic objections are feared or when genre is uncertain: *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Faerie Queene* may or may not be novels, but they are surely fiction. In fact, "fiction" is the most unobjectionable term of all, better even than "literature," a word (and therefore, troublingly, maybe even a concept) that has come into use very recently.[8] Of course, like "literature," "fiction" has a lexographic history. It derives from the Latin *fingere*, to invent; it was long used as a synonym for lies, and sometimes for poetry, especially types of poetry that did not aspire to the dignity of epic or tragedy; around the nineteenth century it became synonymous with the novel and, as I've noted, with narrative literature more generally.[9] Yet my point is not ultimately lexographic: as a handful of scholars working on the early English novel have suggested, it is the operations we associate with fiction that are historically bounded.[10]

Broad uses of the word fiction can of course have their own logic and utility. In many ways, humans are uniquely fiction-making animals, as Kendall Walton for one has shown, and it may be that this cognitive ability is an evolutionary adaptation.[11] Moreover, there is certainly nothing inherently wrong-headed about using "fiction" as an umbrella designation for discourses about poetry.[12] Still, a clue that all literatures have perhaps *not* always operated in the fictional mode can be found in one of de Man's favorite authors: Rousseau famously refused to identify himself as the author of *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), a text he presented as authentic correspondence even as he called that authenticity into doubt. Clearly, it would be inaccurate to say, with Frege, that "it is of no concern" to him or his readers whether his heroine

Julie existed. It must be of concern; otherwise he would not have gone to the trouble of addressing the issue in not one but two prefaces. Few if any were duped by Rousseau's posture; it was unconvincing by design, as I will show. The point for now is simply that Rousseau—like many other novelists of his age—did not relinquish the Fregian "reference" of the proper name. And so *Julie* may not really be fiction any more than the *Odyssey*—at least not in the sense of Balzac or Dickens, who were, true to Frege's intuition, unconcerned with the literal reference of their protagonists' proper names. Or rather, less even than unconcerned, if by this we mean, "Maybe Goriot existed, maybe he didn't." Goriot did not exist—no hedging necessary.

This Introduction begins with some examples of how people have spoken, quite diversely, of the relation between poetry (or literature) and history (which itself is an unstable term). In these sections, Aristotle, Richardson, and a few nineteenth-century writers help flesh out some preliminary characteristics of what I will be calling the three "regimes" of poetic invention—the Aristotelian regime, the pseudofactual regime, and the fictional regime. Of special concern will be explaining what we lose if—following previous critics who have tried to replace the history of the novel with a history of fiction—we consider the pseudofactual novel to be merely an early version of the fictional novel: what came "before fiction," as my title implies, was *not fiction*. (It was not inadequate, clunky, or naïve for not being fiction; it simply consisted of practices and rationales that fiction replaces or at least supplements with others.) I will finish up with some methodological remarks designed both to clarify what I mean by the term regime and to underline how the type of literary history it subtends departs from most accounts of the novel's rise. This all amounts, I hope, to a preliminary case for the pragmatic usefulness of a historically restricted definition of fiction; given space limitations, it cannot be a full presentation and defense of modern fiction's "legitimacy" (to borrow a term from Hans Blumenberg).[13] Readers are asked to keep in mind that my analyses of the six writers treated in the chapters that follow will help fill in many of the blanks in this initial sketch; the Conclusion too chases down some problems it would be premature to tackle at this point. If, as I sometimes fear, *Before Fiction* opens up more questions than it answers, I can only hope that they are at least not the same questions.

Aristotle, Poetry, History

Homer, Rousseau, Balzac: one might grant differences in the way these authors invent without going so far as to deny some of them fictional credentials entirely. Why arbitrarily brand a given cultural practice as fiction proper, excommunicating writers who don't measure up to the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel? Why not speak, rather, of different *types* of fictional modes? This would allow us to say that Homer operates in one mode, Rousseau in another, and Dickens in another still, while all the while not denying that their works have something in common. After all, fiction comes from *fingere*, as I've pointed out myself, and all these writers, readers know, are making or inventing to one degree or another. Surely we can agree that Homer, Rousseau, and Dickens did not write, did not want us to think that they were writing, history. Besides, Aristotle long ago carved out for poetry the domain of the possible, and opposed it to history. Why not call the underlying something that unites their texts—that is, the quality that separates them from historical assertions—"fiction"?

Let's start with Aristotle, then, whose separation of poetry and history has indeed become proverbial, the place we go for an authoritative formulation of what we already know. The famous lines run as follows: "The difference between the historian and the poet is not merely that one writes verse and the other prose—one could turn Herodotus' work into verse and it would be just as much history as before; the essential difference is that the one tells us what happened and the other the sort of thing that would happen."[14] The philosopher's words jibe nicely with modern ideas about verisimilitude, realism, and probability on the one hand, and invention on the other: realistic works don't pretend to be history, they create something of a parallel world that behaves *like* the world of history. Thus modern commentators often see Aristotle's "would happen" as endorsing the idea that literature creates alternate, probable, or hypothetical worlds. "It is the artist's task to convince us that this could have happened," writes one critic of the modern novel: "Internal consistency and plausibility become more important than referential rectitude."[15] *Little Dorrit*, we might say, describes what might happen to an imagined debtor imprisoned in Marshalsea, not what the prison's real inmates did and experienced. A reader could always judge Dickens's novel unconvincing (too many coincidences, too much melodrama), but that would just make it unsuccessful fiction, not, obviously, history. Clearly, the "would happen"

of poetry covers Dickens's practice quite nicely; therefore the house of fiction may have many rooms, but it's still fiction through and through.

And there are more ways still to argue that Aristotle's theory of poetry makes way for Little Dorrit. Elaborating on the distinction between what happened and what would happen, the philosopher continues:

> That is why poetry is at once more like philosophy and more worth while than history, since poetry tends to make general statements, while those of history are particular. A "general statement" means one that tells us what sort of man would, probably or necessarily, say or do what sort of thing, and this is what poetry aims at, though it attaches proper names; a particular statement on the other hand tells us what Alcibiades, for instance, did or what happened to him.

This passage too can underwrite an extension of the *Poetics* to the modern novel. First, the novel's nonhistorical characters can be said to embody social types, human values and experiences, lessons about this or that; it is thus general. Stephen Halliwell has warned, I think rightly, that there is little to no evidence for this understanding of Aristotle's generality, however, and so he proposes a second, less anachronistic resemblance between poetic generality and modern fiction.[16] After all, we routinely speak of successful fiction as creating a thick, internally coherent world, and a small modification of the translation can reinforce this: replacing "would happen" with "might happen" or "could happen" aligns poetry still more closely with "hypothetical" or "imaginable realities."[17] Halliwell's case for the relevance of ancient theories of mimesis to enduring problems of representation therefore includes the suggestion that the author of the *Poetics* "is feeling his way . . . toward a notion of the fictional or the fictive."[18] History is what happens, poetry is what might happen, what can be imagined as happening. Historians are given their material, poets invent it. And so do novelists, we now add.

For at least two reasons, however, Aristotle is less firm than we are in this happy division of labor. First, as Halliwell himself notes, generality—what "would happen"—is much more plausibly understood as a structural feature of poetry, related to plotting, causality, motives and so on. Aristotle, who disliked nothing so much as episodic plots, defines it himself as "what can happen in a strictly probable or necessary sequence." Second, generality for Aristotle can hardly mean that the poet "imagines" or "invents" people and events that could "realistically" have existed or happened, for the simple

reason that Greek poets, while inventing motives and causes, do not usually invent their heroes. Instead, they use proper names referring to the very same people historians do. Poetry is general, writes Aristotle, and he explains that this involves probability and necessity—plotting. But he cannot keep from adding, "though it attaches proper names"—the "though" registering an obstacle to a clean opposition between poetry and history. This does not destroy the criterion of poetic generality, certainly, for we can take our interpretive cue from subsequent commentators and practitioners (say, those of the French neoclassical stage) and understand the philosopher's words like this: the historian cannot choose among things that happened to Alcibiades, whereas the poet selects certain things and invents other things said or done, in view of constructing a unified plot. But Aristotle's "though" does complicate our assimilation of that generality to the modern idea of a fictional world: the world of poetry is causally coherent, but it is not invented in quite the same way as is a novel by Dickens, whose protagonists were not Gladstone or Disraeli.

The passage moreover does not stop here, as if Aristotle himself were not quite convinced that he had explained why poetry was "general." That this remains a problem is made clear by Aristotle's swerve away from tragedy to a species of poetry that is more obviously both supportive of claims to generality and distinct from history. "That poetry does aim at generality has long been obvious in the case of comedy, where the poets make up the plot from a series of probable happenings and then give the persons any names they like, instead of writing about particular people as the lampooners did." The logic here is not spelled out, but presumably we are to infer that comic playwrights—as distinct from the satiric playwrights ("lampooners," or more literally, "iambic poets") of what we now call "Old Comedy"—invent and name protagonists who embody given human character types, who are therefore walking generalities. (Aristotle itemized various character types in his *Ethics*, and his descriptions would be greatly elaborated by his student Theophrastus.) Comedy, then, makes for a cleaner opposition between poetry and history. Yet for a second time Aristotle is drawn back to the fact that tragedy doesn't function this way at all: "In tragedy, however, they stick to the actual names." At this point, Aristotle finally drops the idea of poetry as a general statement and advances an argument that was enthusiastically developed by his Renaissance followers: "conviction" is instilled in viewers by real events, hence the importance of real protagonists.

The contortions of this famous passage are good evidence of Aristotle's efforts to square his initial hypothesis on poetry's interest in what "would

happen" with the irrepressible fact that tragedy uses proper names. These proper names, which keep popping back up each time the philosopher seems to have the lid on the box, effectively resist the bringing of all poetry, as distinct from history, under the banner of generality. In other words, comedy and tragedy are not general in quite the same way, just as the distinction between the comic poet and the historian is not exactly the distinction obtaining between the tragic poet and the historian. By Aristotle's own reckoning, tragedy and comedy function differently. It is not merely that one depicts people better than they are and the other worse (as he writes elsewhere in the *Poetics*), nor only that one speaks of distinguished families and lofty sentiments, while the other busies itself with the low born and their mundane concerns (as later commentators would repeat). Rather, tragedy deals with real people and comedy with types.

This, at any rate, was what later European commentators would take from Aristotle, and it proved surprisingly adequate to poetic practice for about 2000 years: comic characters were invented; serious protagonists were taken from history. Thus Diderot, toeing the Aristotelian line in 1758, could still divide discourse into three types: "History, where facts are given; tragedy, where the poet adds to history what he thinks likely to increase its interest; comedy, where the poet invents everything."[19] Of course, Diderot leaves out other possibilities, notably fable. And one can easily come up with examples that sit uncomfortably or not at all with the preference for attested subject matter. Aristotle himself backs up after declaring that tragic poets "stick to the actual names" and gives a dutiful nod to Agathon's now lost tragedy *Antheus*, which did feature invented characters. (*Antheus* leads the author of the *Poetics* to shrug off his hypothesis that the reality of characters imparts necessary conviction, since he freely admits that invention doesn't in the end infringe on the audience's pleasure.) But *Antheus* is to all appearances a one-off, for nowhere in the classical corpus do we find references to other such tragedies. To be sure, the Greek novels of Achilles Tatius, Xenophon, Heliodorus, and others, recount the adventures of characters who have no sanction outside the text, as do the works of Petronius and Apuleius that Mikhail Bakhtin pointed to as antecedents of the modern novel.[20] By the same token, however, these works were long denigrated precisely because, like "mere" fables, they lacked the prestige of history. Any number of famed Renaissance works, from More's *Utopia* (1516) and Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516–32) to Rabelais's chronicles (1532–52) and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590–96), are hardly Aristotelian, and indeed flaunt what we can no doubt broadly call their fictionality. Yet on

inspection the invention practiced by these writers bears little relation to the fictionality of a character like Balzac's Goriot: such works are parodically inseparable from either attested heroes of the chivalric past (Ariosto, Spenser), or the truth claims of the New World travel narrative or medieval chronicle (More, Rabelais).[21] Rather than being fictional, they parody what someone else is purported to regard as true.

It is not to impugn the creativity of pre-nineteenth-century writers that I resist speaking of literature as a house of fiction with many, many rooms. Nor does taking fictionality for something other than a universal property of literature imply that invented heroes were, in Foucauldian parlance, "unthinkable" for the Greeks, Romans, or Europeans of the Renaissance. In different ways, all the writers I have just mentioned invent characters from scratch, and an alternate version of the present study could no doubt inventory at length such practices. But our modern indifference to what Frege called characters' "reference" keeps us from making the simple empirical observation that underwrites *Before Fiction*. For much of Western literary history, the principal traffic of literature was in heroes readers had already heard about.

Historical Faith

Curiously—at least at first glance—reference was never more doggedly asserted than just before its nineteenth-century eclipse: for about a hundred years now, literary historians have been drawing attention to the fact that early novelists insisted on the literal truth of their works.[22] And literary historians have also noted, with understandable puzzlement, that few if any contemporaries, readers or writers, seem to have believed in this truth. The situation made for some oddly contorted speculations, like this one, occurring in a famous letter by Richardson to William Warburton. In the middle of *Clarissa*'s serial publication, in 1748, Richardson regrets that Warburton's preface for the third volume explicitly referred to Richardson as the *author* of the letters, not their *editor*:

> Will you, good Sir, allow me to mention, that I could wish that the *Air* of Genuineness had been kept up, tho' I want not the letters to be *thought* genuine; only so far kept up, I mean, as that they should not prefatically be owned *not* to be genuine: and this for fear of weakening their Influence where any of them are aimed to be

> exemplary; as well as to avoid hurting that kind of Historical Faith which Fiction itself is generally read with, tho' we know it to be Fiction.[23]

A rapid interpretation of Richardson's remark would hold that the novelist is reflecting on the very nature of the reading experience; when we read we enter the fictional world by accepting it provisionally as true even though we know otherwise. The letter would be, then, one more reason to believe that fiction always has been fiction. Yet the passage is historically marked, and its propositions are less compatible than they first appear with modern habits. After all, Richardson's desired posture is very close to the one Rousseau will devise and execute for *Julie*: the letters should be presented *as* genuine, but without intent to deceive (there is properly speaking no hoax). But what might that mean? And why bother, if the nature of the reading experience is (as everyone knows) the provisional or temporary acceptance of what we do not really believe?

Richardson gives two reasons for maintaining an "Air of Genuineness," the first of which the modern reader may skip right over in a rush to get to the seemingly more recognizable contention that we read fiction quite simply *as if* it were history. For that first reason is a bit unfamiliar: admitting the exemplary characters as mere fabrications, Richardson holds, will undercut the moral aspirations of the book. The remoteness of Richardson's logic stems from two sources: on the one hand, ("high") literature since Richardson's time has largely divested itself of overt moralizing (it may investigate moral dilemmas, but it shouldn't propose exemplary heroes); on the other, even in the (typically "lower") forms that do propose models of behavior (most obviously, children's literature), it may now be hard to see why a character's nonexistence would disable exemplarity. On the contrary, perhaps it is more common now to assume that invented characters make better role models, since reality, to strike a Lukácsian note, is no place for heroes. Historically, however, this position stands out, because moral exemplarity had always been underwritten by the reality of the exemplars: history itself was our moral compass, and so exemplars were never simply made up, they had to have existed. (Again, we would do better to think of that existence not so much as "empirical" or "documented" as simply attested: exemplary heroes exist in the realm of common knowledge or fame in the Latin sense of "renown," *fama*.) Richardson's worry, then, does make sense within older frameworks for understanding character, recalling for example Aristotle's argument that real characters make for greater conviction.

The unfamiliarity of Richardson's first remark on moral exemplarity is, moreover, a good reason not to regard his second argument for genuineness as self-evident. The trap, I believe, is that we are accustomed to thinking of fiction as an "as if" proposition. And so the novelist here appears to anticipate nicely the formula of Coleridge's that so many now reach for when thought turns to the kind of credence literature demands. Fiction—and Richardson himself uses the word—involves a "willing suspension of disbelief."[24] Yet on inspection, we see that the novelist thinks that the conservation of genuineness increases the "as if" illusion; the more genuineness, then, the more "historical faith." This leaves us some distance from the idea that fiction can be considered as hypothetical, or that it is a sort of make-believe into which one enters with Coleridgian willingness. Nor is his illusion like one of those drawings that can be either a duck or a rabbit but not both at once. And it resembles still less an alternate or possible world. Instead, illusion for Richardson knows greater or lesser degrees; keeping up the pretense of truth simply increases it.

If it goes against a quick intuitive reading of the letter, the above interpretation does at least have the advantage of complete congruence with the assumption of so much seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aesthetic theory: the more you take the spectacle for reality, the greater its effect on you. Burke, in a notorious passage of his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), claims that no matter how good the show, people will always leave a play for a public execution next door.[25] Contemporary attitudes toward capital punishment aside, the comment speaks volumes about how thinkers of the time rationalized the effect of the artwork.[26] The artwork is not fictional in the sense that it is an alternate or hypothetical reality; it is rather a substitute for reality, a simulation that is, unfortunately but necessarily, always a bit off. This explains, then, why Richardson would say that he wished Warburton's preface hadn't given the game away, even though he had no intent to fool people: his readers would have *believed him more* than they now do. "The nearer [the spectacle] approaches the reality," writes Burke, "the further it removes us from all idea of fiction, the more perfect its power."[27] Never perfect, but more perfect—this indeed is the gist of Richardson's apparently paradoxical wish. And Burke's words also remind us that when Richardson says fiction, his use of the term does not substantially diverge from its common meaning—a lie.[28] With the proper presentation, we almost believe lies are true. Now the fact that *Clarissa* was on its way to being a huge success despite Warburton's indiscretion might of course have led Richardson to conclude that illusion—or this type of illusion,

anyway—had nothing to do with the power of his book; but when summoned to express how he thought his novel worked, he took the path traveled by most of the period's thinkers: he indexed it to a literal reality.

Fiction's Reality, Realist Fiction

Richardson's comments on *Clarissa* are representative of a mode of reference I will be calling, with Barbara Foley, the pseudofactual: novelists of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries routinely assert—though ambiguously, half-heartedly, or ironically—the literal reality of their books. Understanding the amplitude of the phenomenon will require more coordinates than just this one letter, and I will give some shortly. Let's look first, however, at a mode of reference that is startlingly different and much more familiar—the reference that Frege says is not reference at all, and that occurs when it does not matter to readers whether a writer's characters ever existed.

Following the dramatic rout of the French army, Europe's largest, in the Franco-Prussian war, a British officer named George Tomkyns Chesney feared for his country's own military preparation. And so he published, in *Blackwood's Magazine* of May 1871, a novella entitled "The Battle of Dorking," in which he recounted an imaginary invasion of Britain, some time in the future, by an unnamed (though German-speaking) aggressor. The story was republished many times, and its hold on the British imagination was considerable. "So powerful is the narrative, so intensely real the impression it produces, that the coolest disbeliever in panics cannot read it without a flush of annoyance, or close it without the thought that after all, as the world now stands, some such day of humiliation for England is at least possible."[29] Thus wrote one critic, and the thought of the possibility of an invasion was enough to accomplish what Chesney wanted, which was to beef up British military peacetime maneuvers. (Inadvertently, Chesney also became the father of a novelistic subgenre, that of invasion fiction.)

Chesney's text, the critic's words, and even the real-world political effects of the tale are from one point of view perfectly unremarkable: novels (and by extension films) can exercise a hold over readers' imaginations and be effective propaganda. Yet from another point of view—Richardson's—this episode would seem remarkable indeed, as we can readily see if we try to apply his standard of "historical faith." Chesney didn't pretend that his story was real, obviously; and how could contemporary readers read it "as" true,

in Richardson's sense of historical truthfulness, since it was clearly set in the future? Note the vocabulary of the critic quoted above: "The Battle of Dorking" produces an intense *impression* of reality, and that impression of reality persuades the reader that what is recounted is *possible*. No faith is necessary, and the effect of the novel does not vary in proportion to the reader's belief in its literal reality. This type of "as if" can work its uncanny magic on the "coolest disbeliever." Chesney's novella in essence advances a proposition about reality via the construction of a particularly vivid world—a vividness that is generated by internal means (presumably character, plot, and detail) and not through the manipulation of a frame (there are no real letters, no discovered manuscripts).

Any reader of Balzac is familiar with his insistence on his novels' engagement with reality. "All is true," he writes at the opening of *Le Père Goriot* (1835), with the bold assertion standing out all the more because Balzac, borrowing from Shakespeare, makes it in English.[30] And one can hardly miss his aspiration to be the historian of his time—"to write the history forgotten by so many historians, that of manners."[31] Truth, history: little seems to have changed since Richardson. No wonder the pseudofactual novel can be easily cast, as we will see many doing, as a forerunner of later realist works: it points away from the ideal and to the real, and by the nineteenth century the victory of the real will be complete. If the terms all come from a common pool, however, there has plainly been a revolution in what they designate. For example, Richardson refrained from asserting truth—"I want not the letters to be *thought* genuine"—whereas Balzac actually goes ahead and asserts it. If truth meant the same thing in both cases, we would have to conclude that Balzac represents something of a regression, and that we have slipped from a time when writers didn't want to pull a fast one to one when they did. But this is obviously not the correct conclusion. Balzac asserts truthfulness where Richardson cannot because his claim is in fact not hard (i.e., literal) but soft: "I am about to tell you how the world really is, as opposed to something that really happened." For Richardson, by contrast, reading with "historical faith" means pretending that the novel's collection of people, actions, and events are in fact a subset of the larger collection of such discrete facts that make up history; to the extent that *Clarissa* talks about "the way things are," it does so because we are to pretend that it *is* one of those things. With Balzac, belonging to the world of Scott and Hegel, history is no longer an aggregate of facts, but something like a system underlying the epiphenomenal particulars of a given age. Because its real subject is less individuals than the society that explains

individuals, to write history is to seek "the hidden meaning of this huge assembly of figures, passions, and events."[32] And this helps explain, at least in part, why writers of the fictional regime show no compunction about inventing their characters. Old Goriot is just as good as any real human being, for the novel's human inhabitants, real or invented, are only the observable surface of the novel's deeper subject. Frege was right to say that it (now) makes no difference whether literary characters exist, but wrong to suggest that this was because (modern) literature did not refer. The novel does, of course, refer—not to real people, but to abstractions we call "the world," "society," or "reality."

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, it became axiomatic that realism claimed to be true.

> For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers as for their readers, realism in literature (even if the word is not always used) is an ideal: the ideal of the faithful representation of the real, the ideal of truthful discourse . . .; all literary revolutions at the time were fought in the name of representation that would be still more faithful to "life."

These lines come from Tzvetan Todorov's introduction to *Littérature et réalité* (1982), a collection of previously published essays bent on showing that realism is in fact deeply mendacious in its claims to transparency and immediacy.[33] One of these was Roland Barthes's 1968 article "L'Effet de réel," probably the most succinct and resonant articulation of a thesis prominent in much of the critic's work: realism pretends to be a transparent window onto the world, and this pretension is bad politics and, more fundamentally, bad semiotics. Realism, writes Barthes, is underwritten by a mystified conception of the sign; instead of consisting of an arbitrary relation between a signifier and a signified, the realist sign is yoked directly and "naturally" to a referent. Realist language hides the fact that language is connotation or signification behind a simple denotation or naming—"the pure meeting of an object and its expression." And the epitome of the realist sign is the insignificant detail; material objects that have no narrative or symbolic function are present in the realist text only to better declare "*We are the real.*" In other words, the realist sign connotes as much as any other sign, but its connotation is that the text is denotation, that signs have referents, that language is—Barthes puts the suspicious word, the last of his essay, in quotes—a " 'representation.' "[34]

Barthes's argument is susceptible to different interpretations, of which

some are clearly further from the author's meaning than others. If the "reality effect" has slipped into common academic parlance, this must be at least partially because the phrase itself doesn't necessarily upset the commonsensical idea that realism was, well, realistic. According to this view, gratuitous details make texts seem real in the sense that they allow for the reader's visualization, or make the fictional world thicker, thus facilitating the proverbial suspension of disbelief.[35] Barthes's interest, however, is more semiotic, and his claims lie elsewhere. First, he suggests that the gratuitous detail does indeed still signify—it signifies "realism" as such, and is thus part of the realist code. This is innocuous enough: there cannot be much quibble with the proposition that genres have specific contracts, and that the intrusive presence of description announces realism just as, say, the *in medias res* expositional conversation announces neoclassical tragedy. Barthes's main point, however, is something else entirely—that realism was built on an illusion, "the referential illusion."[36] The detail did not content itself with announcing the genre of the text, it furthermore attempted to pass itself off as reality itself; that is, not only did it signify "realism," it signified that it didn't signify, that language was pure copying.

This enormously influential essay—it can be said to have underwritten a slew of "debunkings" of realist pretense—has also been the object of not a few critiques. One called into doubt Barthes's reading of Saussurean linguistics by pointing out that Saussure never claimed that the fact that languages were differential systems, or that the link between sounds and concepts was arbitrary, meant that language could not refer to things.[37] Besides, if reference were impossible, the whole argument would undermine itself by its very articulation.[38] But the oddest thing about Barthes's viewpoint was that it seemed to imply what for understandable reasons the critic could not state explicitly. Christopher Prendergast has put the difficulty as follows:

> The implication of "Nous sommes le réel" [We are the real] is that the words of the text try to perform a kind of disappearing act upon themselves; the text plays a trick whereby the reader undergoes the "illusion" of being confronted not with language, but with reality itself; the sign effaces itself before its "referent" in order to create an "effect": the illusion of the presence of the object itself.[39]

The slippage, it would seem, occurs in the double sense of "illusion": when in his (mis)understanding of Saussurean linguistics Barthes speaks of the referential illusion, he means "fallacy"; but he then begins to behave as

though what was at issue, on the part of bad readers, was a properly visual illusion, a bona fide hallucination.[40] Not without reason does Antoine Compagnon assimilate the denotative directness of the reality effect and the leitmotif of Barthes's later essay on photography, *La Chambre claire*: "This has been," says the photograph, echoing the sirenic "We are the real" of realist objects.[41] Indeed, Compagnon lines up examples from Barthes's oeuvre that to all appearances suggest that the theorist modeled his critique of reference on the dispelling of an actual sensory illusion. Barthes was particularly fond of an anecdote from Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare*, recounting an early nineteenth-century performance of *Othello* in Baltimore; a white soldier in the audience, enraged to see a black man lay his hands on a white woman, pulls his gun and shoots the actor. Only a literature that sought, in Barthes's words, to "empty the sign and to distance infinitely its object," could save us from this fate.[42]

Barthes's attack on realism and its "totalitarian ideology of the referent" was no doubt unusual in its slippage from a figurative illusion to a literal one.[43] Todorov's apparently more moderate contentions were in fact the routine ones: realism pretends to be "truthful discourse," "a faithful representation of the real." But even this realism would seem to be made of straw. Here is a realist statement of principles, from the programmatic seventeenth chapter of Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859): "I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind."[44] "Faithful": Eliot uses Todorov's word. "Men and things" sounds a lot like "the real." The novelist even uses the mirror analogy that inevitably arises when conversation turns toward critiquing art's "copying" function. It's as if Eliot's sentence were a concentrate of realism's bogus promises. Read sympathetically, however, it also restores some balance to the realist claim. It should be obvious, first, that Eliot's "faithful account" has nothing to do with, say, the "true history" of Oronooko, the royal slave of Surinam, that Behn circulated a century and a half earlier.[45] One might point out as well that the mirroring function of fiction suggests neither literal truth nor that the novel is a replica of the material world: "in my mind" clearly entails a transformation, and the mirror metaphor, which was a venerable one, did not typically imply anything like copying.[46] A more easily overlooked part of the sentence is simply "men and things," with its deliberate generality: how can realism be a copy if its object is not actually specific? And Eliot might have written "things and men" without changing too much her meaning: it is well known that like so many realists by this time, she was beating away at divisions between "high" and "low" that had long structured thought about the arts, so that a lowly still life could

become indistinguishable from elevated history painting. Doing away with that distinction does not mean only that the lives of carpenters are as worthy of attention as the exploits of generals and statesmen. It also means that, as with Balzac, known human beings are no longer the subject of art. Rather, the world—humans and things, humans as things, sometimes just things staring back at the anonymous procession of human life—is represented.

"A faithful account of men and things," writes Eliot; Balzac speaks in his preface to the *Comédie humaine* of "copying all of society."[47] It's really the object of the account or of the copying here that hides—but hides in plain sight—the complexity, the counterintuitiveness, of the realist operation, and its difference with respect to earlier novels' assertions of truth. (Those earlier assertions were complex as well, as we will see; but they were complex in their own manner.) Todorov insinuates the crude literalism of declarations like these, but—and this is particularly obvious after a consideration of Richardson's posture—there is no literalism: one cannot literally copy abstractions like "men" and "society." No wonder Balzac, Eliot, and others spent so much time thinking about how their novels, full of people who never existed and whose existence was never even asserted, were faithful copies: they weren't stating something that everyone knew but rather something that, having no precedent, needed to be argued before readers. That something was fiction.

Fiction, then, was real and not real. By this point it should be clear that I do not mean this as a more or less timeless paradox (Fuentes's "The novel [is] a lie that is the foundation of truth"), nor as a formulation of the mitigated credence ("suspended disbelief") that is frequently assumed to underwrite the literary reading experience—all such experience. Rather, fiction—as opposed to both Aristotle's poetry and the pseudofactual period of the novel's history—is not literally real, for it didn't happen, but it is somehow *like* reality. This is not a matter of content. Though I have used realist authors to illustrate fiction, and though literary realism is certainly fictional, fiction is also more than realism: it need not concern itself with class relations, milieu, money, poverty, the everyday, and other common attributes of the realist novel. Nor does fiction need to be "realistic" in the sense of historically or scientifically possible, which is in part why I mentioned the example of Chesney's "Battle of Dorking"; ghosts, time travel, and counterfactual history are no more or no less fictional than the sober and documented realist novel.

What makes fiction fiction (and what makes the realist novel fiction) is not content but the oblique manner in which it makes propositions about the world.[48] Unlike the pseudofactual mode, which asserts literal truth so as to lay

claim to other sorts of truth (moral, emotional, and so on), it operates analogically or hypothetically. Hypothetically: the vivid world postulated by Chesney's novella is taken as a comment on the world that we share. "Dear Reader!" writes Dickens at the end of *Hard Times* (1854), "It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not."[49] Analogically: the writer of fiction says, in essence, "This sort of thing is always happening," "This book is like the world." Readers are free to remain skeptical, but their skepticism will not be voiced as a denunciation of the literal truth of the story, nor even as a denunciation of the novel's inability to make claims on reality because it is not factually true. One attacks, rather, the analysis the book makes of the world. So when Lamartine criticized Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), he wrote, quite simply, "The world is not like that."[50] Fiction whose propositional value you reject becomes a fairy tale—imaginings that may well be internally consistent and vivid, but whose analogical power, whose claim on reality, is nil.

Reality Before Realism, or, the Pseudofactual

Fiction, then, was subtly paradoxical, advancing propositions about the world—and about very specific parts of that world—via the destinies of invented characters. "[My book] won't be imaginary facts, it will be what happens everywhere" (Balzac); "My method is to depict true things with invented characters" (Hugo): it is hard to see in such abundant reformulations the desire to get readers "to believe without reservation in the reality of the fictive worlds [writers] created," or an attempt to "encourage a benumbed and credulous form of reading that accepts at face value the most banal tricks of the referential illusion."[51] Nineteenth-century writers pushed the paradox to the fore, as if trying to think it through; scholars of realism have largely ignored it. In good part this is due to the "straw man" attacks on realist naïveté I have mentioned: imagining that realism was an attempt at illusion is good for bolstering our sense of our own sophistication. Yet what is notable about realist novels, from another point of view, is precisely their "-ist": they do not pretend to be literally true. If we are looking for hyperbolically literal claims to truth, the place to go is not the nineteenth century, but the eighteenth or before. It is there we find the model of art-as-illusion; it is there theorists approvingly repeat anecdotes like that of the Baltimore soldier, which far from being representative of realism—*pace* Barthes—was making a very belated apparition in Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare*; and it is there writers assert time

and again the literal truth of their works, works that typically take the form of documents—letters, memoirs, and other purportedly discovered manuscripts.

Examples of the pseudofactual posture will occur to anyone familiar with the canonical works of Defoe or Marivaux or Graffigny, Walpole or Mackenzie or Laclos. But beyond such general impressions, what do we really know about this strange phenomenon? In one sense, a good deal—though our knowledge has been shaped and limited by an inability to separate the history of the novel from the history of realism. Assertions of literal truth, many have long argued, are part and parcel of the novel's turn toward reality, a turn that was accomplished in the nineteenth century. The English and French pseudofactual novel was "a peculiar phase of the theory of realism," declared the title of the 1913 article by Arthur Jerrold Tieje that may be the first modern scholarly examination of the subject. Knowingly or not, most have followed Tieje's lead, producing a narrative that (for France at least) goes like this. In the 1660s, readers began to reject the marvelous but improbable deeds associated with the long French *romans héroïques*; plots and settings that matched everyday experience became the rage. As a result, the deliberately remote historical settings of the romance were replaced by the historical novella, or *nouvelle historique*, which made use of more recent, documented history (Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* [1678] is the celebrated example). Numerous other novellas were said to be true stories, recently transpired; their geography was that of French cities, and characters started sporting French names. Subsequently, the faux memoir established itself as the form that bridged history and the novel; as it faltered in the mid-eighteenth century, the epistolary novel, better able to "write to the moment" as the ascendant reign of *sensibilité* demanded, came into its own and dominated production until into the nineteenth century, when interest in the workings of history finally displaced interest in the workings of the heart.[52] (The English novel requires some alteration of the specifics of the narrative, but as we'll see in a moment, the big picture doesn't change much.) Hence, in his 1969 study *Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir Novel*, Philip Stewart sees pseudofactual strategies as part of realism's rise out of the ashes of improbable romance: "The technique of imitating reality . . . did not await [nineteenth-century realists]: it had been pieced together by a score of novelists good and bad in the first half of the eighteenth century."[53] In a synthesis of Stewart's findings and those of others, Dorrit Cohn thus concludes, "Historians of the novel have shown that, as the [eighteenth] century advanced and readers learned to accept the norms of literary realism, novelists tended to drop claims to reality or factuality."[54] By the claiming the literal

truthfulness of their texts, writers helped point literature away from the allegorical or the ideal and toward the real; once the ideal had been vanquished, the posture could be abandoned.

The fact that Cohn's synthesis occurs in a work titled *The Distinction of Fiction* suggests, however, a slightly different way of understanding this evolution. Realism, after all, is not real but openly fictional. What may be needed, then, is to turn the "more and more real" narrative on its head. This is what Lennard Davis does in his 1983 book *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*, which rewrites the history of the novel not as a tightening of the bond with reality but rather as the discovery of fictionality itself. For Davis, the modern novel does not develop by turning away from romance, as many have argued or assumed; rather, the novel becomes the novel by distancing itself from factual forms of discourse. The seventeenth century, he argues, witnessed the birth and expansion of an "undifferentiated matrix" where news reports and novels were essentially indistinguishable forms of discourse. Then, in the eighteenth century, "as the news/novel discourse began to subdivide, and as the culture began making clearer demands for factual or fictional narrative, the old claim that a work was true become harder to substantiate. As that happened, the possibility arose that a work could be purely fictional."[55] Whereas most critics had seen a formerly fanciful genre being slowly altered through the invention of new techniques of accurate imitation, Davis casts the process as something of the reverse: the novel starts as true, and then slowly evolves indices of its fictionality. As for when this occurs, Davis argues that the "shift toward the fictional" is detectible in Defoe; the shift has not yet fully occurred in Davis's two other major figures, Richardson and Fielding, but the implication is that once fiction has been explored by writers of this caliber, others will consolidate the gains.

Davis's account was quickly followed by Barbara Foley's *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (1986), which provides, at least on the face of things, a different version of the transformation. By allotting separate chapters to the pseudofactual eighteenth century and the realist nineteenth, Foley builds into the structure of her book an opposition. Indeed, Foley repeatedly stresses a qualitative break between pseudofactuality and the nineteenth-century historical novel, which she also calls "fiction" and "realism": both forms are marked by their own "representational strateg[ies]" and underwritten by distinct "conceptions of history."[56] Yet despite this explicit opposition, Foley too lapses into slow-march-of-realism language that echoes Cohn's paraphrase. She writes: "as the eighteenth century progressed, readers

increasingly tired of tongue-in-cheek authorial disavowals of mimetic [i.e., fictional or novelistic] intent"; "The rise of the mode that we term 'realism' clearly involved an initial dependence upon, but an ultimate replacement of, the 'sense of the real' [i.e., the claim to literal truth]."[57] And Foley situates the process where Davis does: "Hesitatingly in the works of Defoe, then more boldly in subsequent novels of the eighteenth century, the pseudofactual imposture signaled the invocation of a mimetic contract."[58] The result is that neither Foley nor Davis has much shifted our understanding of literary history. Before, pseudofactual insistence on the novel's literal reality was the origin of realism; now, pseudofactual irony is seen as the first sign of a concept of the fictional. Defoe, no longer an incipient realist, has been repurposed as an early theorist of fictionality. We are left with a familiar arc, plotted using the same old coordinates; all that has been done has been to rename the endpoint.

The most noted scholar to take up the problem of fiction's history, Catherine Gallagher, has successfully avoided such gradualism. Unlike Davis or Foley, who both postulate a slow change—"readers increasing tired" and so on—Gallagher works from an implicitly Foucauldian model of rupture: in the middle decades of the eighteenth century there occurred a "massive reorientation of textual referentiality" that replaced the early novel's direct reference to real people with fiction.[59] Gallagher develops this idea in two separate accounts. The first, found in *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994), is particularly noteworthy because it uses coordinates that previous scholars hadn't: the rupture of modern fictionality is readable not in the usual English suspects—Defoe, Richardson, Fielding—but in texts by women authors. Unlike Manley's "transparently slanderous" *New Atalantis* (1709), a paradigm for the keyed narratives of the early eighteenth century that refer to real people under the cover of historical or fanciful masks, Lennox's *Life of Harriot Stuart, Written by Herself* (1750) was not read as keyed and "made few serious demands on the public's credit."[60] The invention of fiction, Gallagher suggests, must lie somewhere between the two. Her second account, "The Rise of Fictionality" (2003; English trans. 2006), is chronologically compatible with the narrative of *Nobody's Story*, though it reverts to the figures prominent in familiar histories of the English novel. Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742), Gallagher observes, contains a famous passage that explicitly denies that the novel portrays real people; Fielding claims instead to describe types drawn from life. The change from the pseudofactual posture of *Robinson Crusoe* is obvious, and therefore sometime between 1720 and 1742 "new modes of non-reference arose" and the novel became properly fictional.[61] For

Gallagher, fiction does rise, but not quite in the manner of Davis and Foley. Instead, the pretense of truth is simply swept off the stage by fictionality.[62]

A worry, however, is that in all three accounts the line between fiction and a type of novel that purportedly preceded it grows so maddeningly fuzzy that any real distinction is blotted out. For Foley, not only are the variously ironic pseudofactual stances of the eighteenth-century novel cast as the early stage of fictional realism; in addition, the ironic stance is already detectible in Behn's novels of the 1680s.[63] Mightn't the pseudofactual always be, from the very beginning, just an early fictionality? Meanwhile, Davis's wording makes it impossible to determine when the modern opposition between fact and fiction was in place. The culture "began" to make demands of a clear separation, Davis says in the passage I quoted above. Yet how can a culture desire a separation of two things between which it cannot distinguish? How can people want what they can't yet conceive? And when exactly did they begin to make their demands for something new? At what point did the old truth claims "bec[o]me harder to substantiate"? Does this mean that people once took the claims seriously and then wised up? What exactly is this "possibility . . . that a work could be purely fictional" that "arose"? Did it arise collectively? In the mind of one author, or a group of vanguard readers? In *Nobody's Story*, Gallagher achieves a sharper separation, but mostly because by using the keyed scandalous narratives of the early eighteenth century as a foil for the obviously bogus truth pretense of Lennox's *Life of Harriot Stuart*, she avoids confronting the saturating presence of the pseudofactual mode. Certainly, Lennox's truth-posture makes few serious demands on the public's credit—but how exactly do her demands differ from the demands of Richardson, Defoe, or even Montesquieu, who prefaces *Les Lettres persanes* (1721) by saying "The Persians of the following letters stayed with me in my home"?[64] Moreover, if the pseudofactual form of *The Life of Harriot Stuart* was just a shell, not to be taken seriously, why wouldn't any number of earlier faux memoirs—say, Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* (1731–1742), or even Villedieu's pioneering *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* (1672–1674)—be equally plausible signs that the modern concept of fiction was in the works?[65] In Gallagher's view, the referential "somebodies" of the early novel are replaced by fictional "nobodies"; the worry, however, is that it is difficult to tell a nobody from a somebody as long as the pseudofactual form is present. For Davis and Foley, the pseudofactual prepares the way for the fictional; but since on inspection consciousness of the fictional is already incubating within the pseudofactual, the whole distinction falls apart.

Furthermore, the longevity of the pseudofactual posture is odd. As Foley and Davis remark with some surprise, the mock affirmation of truth, which is supposed to be "reced[ing] to subordinate status" in Defoe, is still alive and well much later—later even than Richardson, whom Tieje chose as his terminus.[66] Foley mentions as late pseudofactual residue titles like Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker* (1771) and Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). As belated as the latter is, it still allows us to preserve at least the idea that the nineteenth century will mark a clean start. But of course it doesn't: pseudofactual assertions soldier on long into the nineteenth century. Chateaubriand's *Atala* (1801) is a true tale, oral at the outset, then relayed back to the author; Constant's *Adolphe* (1816) is a memoir replete with bogus provenance; Sand's *Indiana* (1832) is a historical anecdote; Hugo, in *Le Dernier Jour d'un condamné* (1829), makes effective use of a heretofore largely unexploited pseudofactual form, the journal, prefacing it with the familiar editorial equivocations. Meanwhile, Shelley presents her *Frankenstein* (1818) as fact; in America, Poe does the same with *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). And still in mid-century England, heedless of dominant third-person omniscience, the Brontë sisters press all manner of pseudofactual frames into service. If in Richardson the truth pretense is, by the reckoning of another critic, "vestigial," what are we to make of these much later examples?[67] What permits us to say that readers of certain works read them as fictional, whereas the readers of earlier ones were unequipped with that conceptual category? Villedieu, Lennox, Constant, Poe—to which one did readers cease, for the first time, according serious credit? It's convenient to think of fiction rising, but a slope that goes on for so long may be closer to a stretch of even ground. Or, for that matter, uneven: in the course of this book we will see that writers such as Rousseau and Diderot take the truth of their novels much more seriously than Crébillon, who writes several decades before them, and that well before them all, Lafayette centers a historical novel around a heroine who never existed: "as the [eighteenth] century advanced and readers learned to accept the norms of literary realism, novelists tended to drop claims to reality or factuality": does the record really confirm the reassuringly steady advance of the fictional that Cohn takes, no doubt accurately, from the scholarship?[68]

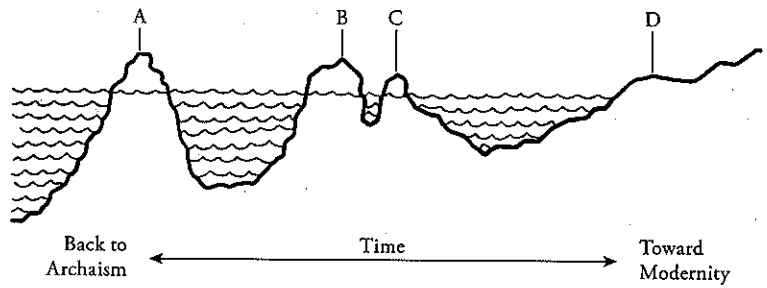
Such difficulties are enough to cast doubt on the effort to isolate fiction historically. The mock-factual statements issued by pseudofactual novels are after all difficult to distinguish from fictional statements, since no one is intended to believe either. Perhaps novels that make ambivalent assertions of literal truth are really not so different from novels that make no literal claims

whatsoever. Maybe they're just a little more primitive, or maybe, as so many have said for so long, literature by definition has *always* been self-consciously duplicitous about its own veracity. (In the *Odyssey*, characters often make truth claims for their narratives precisely at the moment they are about to lie.) On the other hand, maybe it is the approach that creates the impression that the question of fiction's history is unanswerable or misguided. That approach obliterates the qualitative distinction between the pseudofactual and the fictional in favor of seeing the history of fiction, like that of realism, as a continuum. Just as the novel becomes realist by increasingly emphasizing the material world, it becomes fictional by demanding less and less real credence, until none at all is required and people acknowledge that novels are neither true nor false. For partisans of the rise of realism, Richardson takes one step toward describing bourgeois life, and Balzac another, much bigger one; while if we want to trace the rise of fiction, Richardson's letter to Warburton is the sign of a dawning realization, an individual and collective coming-to-grips with something that Balzac will grasp with more clarity, and that can be called "the nature of fiction." Behind this version of events there are some dubious inferences regarding two kinds of relations—between individual and collective practices on the one hand and between practices and their cognitive or conceptual substrate. These are the problems that my account of literary regimes is designed to correct.

Regimes and the History of Forms

Davis, Foley, and Gallagher's efforts to give fiction a history have a conceptual focus. That is, the way people write novels follows from the way they think; it is because the way they think changes that the novel changes. The schema can be made bi-directional—the novel reflects a change in thought while then furthering and deepening the change—without altering the basic method. Either way, the history of fiction is to be read in a select group of works that document the progress of an underlying conceptual evolution. And this is the way much literary history is done. Individual works are important insofar as they are signs of something else that is otherwise out of sight but nonetheless on the rise—fiction and realism; "the novel," which is often more of an idea than a thing; a culture of this or that; but really just plain modernity.

A drawing of such an approach to fiction's history might look like this. A, B, and C are the great authors who over time were coming to see that their



works could be fictional; to perceive fiction as legitimate, freed from the alibi of history; to realize at long last that reading and writing involved the coveted "willing suspension of disbelief." They sighted the conceptual territory of fiction (D) that would soon emerge for all to colonize. D had always been there, pushing up, but aside from these islands, it remained under water. There is, however, a problem. What if nothing below the waterline links these islands to each other or to the mainland in the distance? Sicily lies smack up against the boot of Italy. But despite appearances, it was never part of the boot; geologically speaking, it's part of North Africa. We see our canonical novels of the past as an archipelago connected to the mainland of now, whereas they may be only a series of data points acting as hosts for our perception of patterns—patterns we perceive based on our knowledge of what is to come.

Do things rise? Of course. Oil painting, or the landscape, or abstract art. In literature, the sonnet and the murder mystery and the naturalist novel. But such things are practices, and tracing the rise of identifiable practices makes a kind of sense that the divination of rising ways of thinking does not. If we redefine fiction as a practice, not as a mode of cognition or an underlying concept detectible beneath the surface of individual works, it too becomes traceable, and its difference with respect to earlier practices—Aristotelian invention and the pseudofactual mode—remains clear. Above, I've tried to bring those different practices into focus using a few examples that I believe are representative of the dominant practices of their time. They add up, I believe, to the following narrative.

As is clear from Aristotle and the classical corpus, for a very long time poets—but of course not all poets—took their characters and their main actions from history and wove their plots around what was commonly said to be true. They went about their work this way not because their thinking was hard-wired, but because they and their audience shared a set of assumptions

about what literature was good for and how it worked upon us. And so during the first big European heyday of the novel—from the beginning of the seventeenth century until around 1660—writers of French romances who wanted to dignify the genre inspired by the Renaissance rediscovery of Heliodorus's fourth-century *Aethiopica* generally hewed close to this sanctioned practice.[69] Then, in the latter decades of the seventeenth century, a new formal possibility was devised that ended up mostly displacing the older method of composition. This innovation is the pseudofactual posture: novels were no longer spun around legendary heroes, they took the form of memoirs, letters, or occasionally eyewitness histories by or about contemporaries of whom no one had heard. No conceptual mutation was necessary for this new phase or regime—just a set of forms offering, as we'll see, concrete advantages over previous forms. Then, around the turn of the nineteenth century, there was a last change—last in the sense that I think we are still in it, not last in the sense of perfect or final. This change is what I'm calling fiction—works that make no bones about their invention despite being set within contemporary reality. (This last trait clearly separates fiction from the "fanciful" genres of the fairy tale or the oriental tale, as well as from allegory.) And as with the pseudofactual novel, represented chiefly by first-person forms, a specific form characterizes the fictional novel—a type of third-person narration that was more or less unexploited before this period. (As my Conclusion will suggest, the fictional novel also makes new use of the first-person forms associated with the pseudofactual regime.)

I call each of these periods regimes. The term must not be confused with Kuhnian "paradigms" or Foucault's "epistemes"—ways of thinking or modes of knowledge production that shift. In fact, even the common vocabulary of "shifting" is out of place, for it yokes us to modeling cultural change along the lines of sudden and unpredictable tectonic movement. Regimes do change, and the change may possibly (but not necessarily) be abrupt. This is not to say, however, that human cognition makes a leap, only that people's literary behavior changes—generally speaking. "Generally" is a loose word, purposely on the opposite end of the spectrum from "shift." Its looseness is not designed to protect my theory from the vagaries of history, which is to say, from troublesome counterexamples. In fact, it is inseparable from what I mean by a regime. Let's take a closer look at the Aristotelian one.

Aristotle mentions Agathon's tragedy *Antheus* as proof that the genre did not need to concern itself with real people; the Greek novels of Xenophon, Heliodorus, and others set invented characters loose in a recognizable

Mediterranean landscape. Greeks and Romans, just like early modern readers, were hardly conceptually short-changed or congenitally literal-minded. They could well imagine invented characters. But, they reasoned, why bother with them? Like many other ancient works, *Antheus* is lost, yet this particular loss is emblematic of a persistent disinterest in characters with no historical sanction. Most commentators were much less forgiving than Aristotle on this point, even when they were Aristotelians: when examples of made-up narratives were there to be denigrated, they were. Macrobius treated Petronius's and Apuleius's works as childish fables; the emperor Julian in the fourth century firmly rejected the Greek romances that were nothing but spurious history.[70] (Comedy always constituted an exception: it was the one place where pure invention did not bring down upon the poet charges of irrelevance, though it did of course make the genre an also-ran to epic and tragedy in terms of prestige. I will postpone consideration of comic types until Chapter 3.) Of course, some people must have enjoyed these writings, but given the widespread opprobrium—which meant that cultural prestige did not accrue to works not dealing with real heroes—it is no wonder more writers did not push further in this direction.

If the Aristotelian critical tradition did not sanction the use of invented heroes, this was not because they didn't have the right "mental equipment,"[71] but—much less dramatically—because they reasoned that heroes should be taken from history. As we've seen, Aristotle's treatise did not set history and literature as two opposite poles—what moderns might want to call the poles of fact and fiction. On the contrary, literature was what poets made of the gaps in history, and conversely, as Lionel Gossman has emphatically put it, "*History was a branch of literature.*"[72] *Antheus* was only an exception to what would become one of the essential rationales for historical subject matter: poets use historical figures, Aristotle wrote, "because it is what is possible that arouses conviction, and . . . what did happen is clearly possible, since it would not have happened if it were not."[73] Aristotle was not necessarily the root of the belief in the superiority of historical subjects; after all, the author of the *Poetics* described an existent state of affairs, and one which may well have characterized other pre-modern cultures as well.[74] Moreover, even in the Middle Ages when direct Aristotelian influence was sparse, history remained at the core of many prestigious poetic forms.[75] This enduring bent, combined with the prestige of Aristotle upon the Renaissance rediscovery of his *Poetics*, explains why early modern thinkers returned again and again to the historical core of poetry, or at least important poetry: the object of imitation needed to be a real

one if the audience was to be persuaded and moved. The Spanish humanist Vives put the matter this way in 1522: "Those who are called 'poets' in Greek may relate whatever distortions and embellishments of truth that public fame (that monster of many heads) has concocted. But he who makes up the whole of what he tells is to be thought [more] a fool, or rather a liar, than a poet."[76] And well over two hundred years later Fielding was still stressing, however ironically, *Tom Jones*'s conformity with "that universal Contempt, which the World . . . have cast on all historical Writers, who do not draw their Materials from Records."[77]

Dissenters, naturally, dissented. Sidney, with his oft-cited separation of poetry from history (in *The Apologie for Poetry*, c. 1583), was one. Rabelais, Ariosto, and Spenser are hardly orthodox Aristotelians (even if, as I've briefly suggested, they do not give history as short a shrift as might be supposed). Yet the Aristotelian line only hardened in the seventeenth century, as is evidenced by an evolution I've alluded to: imitating the Greek novel, which did not use characters of renown, French romance writers gave it a historical inflection.[78] Upon its appearance in Amyot's French translation of 1547, Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* was praised by humanists for reasons we will see in Chapter 2. While its nonhistorical subject matter was not an insurmountable barrier to appreciation, it did restrict the work's claim to our attention by eliminating, Amyot reasoned in his preface, any possible utility: the *Aethiopica* was nothing more than good leisure reading for the fatigued humanist scholar.[79] Unsurprisingly, then, imparting prestige to romance in the Heliodorian model required beefing up its historical credentials. "[When] lies are made openly, such crude falsity makes no impression on the soul, and gives no pleasure," wrote Georges and Madeleine de Scudéry in the preface to their romance *Ibrahim* (1641–44); "how can I be touched by the misfortunes of the Queen of Guindaye, or of the King of Astrobatia, since I know that their kingdoms are nowhere on the universal map, or more precisely, in the realm of things?"[80] Romance was thus made to conform to general neoclassical arguments about verisimilitude, summed up in the formulation of Boileau, "The spirit is not moved by what it does not believe."[81] And early aesthetic speculation—in contradistinction to Kantian or Hegelian thought—built on the primacy of history by conceiving of art as an ersatz experience of reality, as a simulation or illusion. The theories of Burke, which I've mentioned in the context of Richardson's editorial posture, are merely one late variant on this line of thought, in which illusion, necessarily imperfect, grounds the efficacy of the spectacle.[82] The Marquis d'Argens, in his 1739 "Discours sur les nouvelles," protested that

he didn't see why readerly involvement was discouraged by openly invented characters: "The author of a romance or a novel (*un roman ou une nouvelle*) has had enough genius to imagine a plot (*un sujet*), to decorate it with the circumstances that captivate and move the soul of the reader. So why can't he invent names? What prevents him?"[83] Nothing except tradition.

And in a sense, even tradition doesn't prevent authors of any period from inventing their protagonists. Tradition, after all, is merely a mass of practices and beliefs that individuals may reject or modify as they see fit. The question is whether such inevitable variation, which may remain strictly individual or possibly resolve into subpractices (like the Greek novel itself), causes a change in dominant practices. In some cases the answer must be yes, in others no. It probably depends on being in the right place at the right time with the right invention.

Here the example of the pseudofactual's leading edge is relevant. The pretense of truth was not new to the years around 1670: Cervantes claimed to discover and translate a chronicle relating the life of Don Quixote, and any number of writers had offered "true stories"—of capital crimes, say, or of fantastic voyages—for the edification or amazement of their readers. But around 1670 in France the traditional contents of the novel—quite simply, love and adventure—are poured into a number of new forms. The first epistolary novels, for instance: *Lettres portugaises* (1669), commonly attributed to Guilleragues; or *Le Portefeuille* (1674), by Villedieu. Early memoir novels: Villedieu's *La Vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*, which I've mentioned; Bremond's *Mémoires galants* (1680); Courtilz de Sandras's *Mémoires de Mr L.C.D.R.* (1687). Novels, often cast as long letters to a friend, purporting to recount various adventures recently befallen the writer or people in the writer's circle: Préchac's *Voyage de Fontainebleau* (1678); Murat's *Voyage de campagne* (1699). And finally the aforementioned historical novella: Saint-Réal's *Dom Carlos* (1672), Boursault's *Le Prince de Condé* (1675). As I will show in Chapter 1, this last form, though often taken for a key step toward novelistic modernity, was in fact composed along well-trodden Aristotelian lines (it focused on attested heroes from the European past), and at any rate had no posterity (by 1700 the subgenre is exhausted). But the other forms offered something Aristotelian invention did not. They made a place for writers, from bourgeois hacks to aristocratic women, who were not poets in the old, classically trained sense; and readers who read for leisure and not for learning could read about themselves rather than figures of the remote past.

The pseudofactual posture, then, had advantages. By allowing writers to

set their stories in the present, it permitted a much more direct commentary on contemporary life.[84] Novelists were endlessly concerned with how they could use their works to make not only general ethical claims (which of course continued to be explored), but also to raise problems foreign to the figures bequeathed by history. If you wanted to address issues such as the institutions of marriage and slavery, the mores of Paris or London, social prejudice, political chicanery, and the abuses of the Church, then the benefits of the pseudofactual novel were clear. Another advantage to the mode was that at bottom it provided new forms without breaking with the long-established historical bent of Aristotelian poetics. Some violence was done to the common idea that the more illustrious the protagonist, the more forceful and prestigious the artwork: Defoe's Roxana, certainly, is no Orestes. But what was lost in pedigree was gained in illusory immediacy, since readers were given to read not a poet's invention, written in the blanks of history, but the hero's own writing. Total belief was not required: Richardson's letter to Warburton demonstrates that illusion was not held to be an all-or-nothing proposition. Nonetheless, whatever belief there was (and the more, the better) was envisioned as a species of the belief we have in historical discourse—literal belief with something subtracted, as it were, rather than a special type of belief reserved for literature. Granted, the epistolary novel marks quite a change from the epic; but at the same time, Richardson's pseudofactual stance toward the reality of Clarissa's letters does not bring us very far from Aristotle, for whom what has actually happened guarantees conviction.

The pseudofactual form, once invented, prospered because it offered something to writers and readers. But invention is necessary, and this was the case with fictional forms as well. The pseudofactual novel features either a real person narrating his or her own deeds, or a real person narrating the deeds of real people. No one believes in all these "real people," of course, but everyone agrees to *pretend*. Why can't the pretense be dropped, given that no one believes it? Partially because of the rationales I've outlined, but also, no doubt, because the pretense derives from the forms themselves—from the letters, the memoirs, the biographies, the true histories. The fictional novel requires a new form of third-person narration. Pseudofactual third-person narrators recount a story of which they are not part; but because they pretend write what they have seen or heard, they belong to the same "storyworld" as the characters. The third-person narrators of fiction, by contrast, are not part of the storyworld of their novels; in many cases they are invisible, and the story seems to be somehow telling itself. But even when narrators are intrusive in their use

of the word "I," the "I" is no longer that of Behn or Fielding, no more than it recalls the much older poet-bard of, say, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1383) or the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Rather, it belongs to an author-narrator who invents the persons and actions of which he or she writes. The novel that seems to tell itself and the novel told by an author-narrator who is in no way a "witness": obviously these techniques open up new vistas for the genre. But they are, precisely, techniques, not a timeless narrative option that Richardson or Rousseau chose not to employ. The eighteenth-century novel's inertia was not conceptual, but formal. Appropriating real-world discursive forms was the only game in town—at least until writers started to experiment with other possibilities and slowly stretched the bounds of what the novel could do.[85]

What is a literary regime, then? A dominant practice, modifiable over time, that corresponds to what enough people want their literature to do. Such a qualified proposition may seem toothless. It would be much better for the prestige of literary historians if something more dramatic were afoot—a change in worldview, a cultural mutation, a revolution in what is thinkable by humans, all registered first by the Geiger-like sensitivity of the literary work. And being able to read in the too-well-known pages of the canon the secret correspondences between novels and other apparently separate domains—this cements the critic's ingenuity. Fiction's advent has been tied in this way to momentous transformations and hidden causes. For Michael McKeon, nuancing Ian Watt's argument that novels reflected a new empirical philosophical stance, the genre has to steer a dialectical path between the rock of empiricism and the hard place of skepticism, arriving at fiction as a soft middle ground. For Foley, realist fiction is logically subtended by a new vision of history. Gallagher looks away from philosophy and toward economics, suggesting that fiction follows from developments in capitalism, notably the use of credit.[86] John Bender prefers to underline fiction's congruence with the scientific hypothesis.[87] I am certainly not prepared to deny a certain Lockean *je ne sais quoi* about the pseudofactual novel, especially since it is not hard to find corroboration that in the early modern period a qualitatively new form of discursive referentiality—what Timothy Reiss dubs "analytico-referential discourse"—replaced the textual practices of humanism or scholasticism, rooted in the citation of prior authorities.[88] And discourses do interpenetrate. Fielding, trained as a lawyer, integrated legal standards of proof into *Tom Jones*[89]; Zola's interest in the experimental science of Claude Bernard is a still more obvious example. But this is another order of link than the one proposed by the above

scholars. Rarely content with demonstrable influence or seeking to leverage it into something grander, practitioners of Cultural Studies especially posit something more like a form of "magical 'sympathy' " between otherwise disparate cultural manifestations.[90] To be sure, if we get sufficiently abstract about what fiction "is," then yes, we will start to notice suggestive resemblances with any number of other cultural elements. But this is not evidence of a link; it is evidence of the human propensity to see patterns—to assume the islands of data are subtended by a common conceptual or logical substrate. I am as intrigued by coincidences as anyone—by the fact, say, that Kant defines the judgment of taste as being "indifferent as regards the existence of an object" precisely in 1790, which is to say the moment properly fictional forms started to multiply.[91] Nevertheless, the present study simply resists the temptation to link fiction to the domains of philosophy, science, economics, law, and so on.

Before Fiction remains focused, rather, on the nuts and bolts of literary form. My intraliterary preoccupations do not mean that I regard literature as autonomous or absolute in the common modern sense. After all, the fact that the writers of the period I deal with attributed to literature effects both moral and emotional implies something far from aesthetic autonomy (art-for-art's sake), disinterestedness (art is for the mind not the senses), or self-referentiality (the medium is the message). Literary form, therefore, is not an aesthetic but *morphological* matter. If we stop asking what the novel is a "sign of," an array of interesting and nearly unasked questions come into view—questions that have little to do with those old studies that simply grouped novels into waxing and waning subgenres or schools. Here are a few. When do individual innovations modify communal practice and when don't they? Do inherited forms possess a kind of inertia, or, reformulated slightly, might literature show signs of "path-dependence"? If so, what is necessary for a new formal regime to overcome an old one? Is formal evolution continuous, or marked by plateaus and breaks, or a combination of both? Which possibility fits the data better: does an earlier form "turn into" a later form, or is the later form actually a competitor, coming to dominate and displace the other because it is better at doing certain things? Does a given form imply a content, or can new forms simply serve as vehicles for the same old preoccupations? Or do we observe a lag between the new form and the subsequent exploitation of the possibilities it offers—as when Walter Benjamin describes the use of iron in the nineteenth century at first mimicking familiar materials and then, slowly, permitting heretofore impossible constructions?[92] Are literary forms, instead of being possibilities that any writer can pull out of the air when needed, something more like

technologies—devices that need to be invented and then worked on by their inventor and the inventor's competitors? What would a history of the novel written as a history of forms, as a morphological history, look like?

For better or worse, it wouldn't look entirely like *Before Fiction*, which at its origin was conceived much along the lines of the histories I have come to critique. This book carries in its structure—chapters on individual novelists strung together like chronological pearls—the trace of a mode of inquiry that the actual works, once contextualized, invalidated. But form, no more than biology, is not destiny, and the six case studies that follow no longer point to something "happening" underneath or around them. On the contrary, they show rather clearly that apart from some local skirmishes, nothing is happening, in the sense that fiction is not coming into being. Maybe elsewhere it is—I doubt it—but not in the texts I have selected. If we want to know how fictional forms came to dominate the novel, then we need to study the spread of their devices—notably, as I've hinted and as I will sketch out further in the Conclusion, the use of omniscient narration. That would require, obviously, a quite different type of study, one in which unusual individual works would fade into the background.[93] So, because a few isolated cases, contextualized or not, can't add up to a history of communal practices, *Before Fiction* is only a prolegomenon to a future history that one day may offer a more adequate understanding of the various succeeding and competing forms the novel has taken.

regimes: isolated works were isolated, while clusters of works occupied literary niches in the generic environment of the time.

But the argument is not only one of quantity, as if what happened around 1800 was that many more works started to be composed in a manner that had heretofore been practiced only haphazardly. The problem with asking the apparently reasonable question of whether fiction existed before the nineteenth century is that it implies that specific books are signs that some governing thing—fiction—has come into existence. Yet there is no such thing as fiction outside novels that are fictional. To say that fiction exists can only mean that the practice of fiction exists, that people write fiction. So did people write fiction before the nineteenth century? Some people wrote books that feature patently invented characters, but this undeniable fact does not amount to (nor does it lead to) the practice that characterizes the novel from around 1800 on, when the general abandonment of pseudofactual pretense opened the door to the development of new, "unnatural" forms of narration. I do not pretend to have mapped that abandonment and that development here. I do hope that I have shown why such a study needs to be done. For what is fictional about modern fiction may be much less its contents than its modes of narration.

Notes

INTRODUCTION: THE THREE REGIMES OF THE NOVEL

Epigraph: Mullan, *How Novels Work*, 9.

1. *As You Like It* III, 3; Fuentes, "In Praise of the Novel," 614.

2. Blumenberg, "Concept of Reality," 29.

3. Frege, "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*," 57; I have replaced *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, left untranslated for editorial reasons, with the customary "sense" and "reference." (*Bedeutung* is occasionally rendered by "denotation" or "nominatum.")

4. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*, provides a capacious synthesis of theories of fictionality; he discusses early "segregationist" theories, which maintained a sharp line between fiction and factual discourse, on 11–17. Since the restrained historical definition of fiction offered in the present study has little common ground with the still-growing field of fictionality studies, for the most part I will not even attempt to canvas research on the philosophy of possible worlds, narratological approaches to the fiction-history distinction, and so on.

5. On Greek attitudes regarding the reality of gods and mythological heroes, see Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe*; a major strand of thought held historical truth to be a kind of vulgate, consecrated by tradition.

6. Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 72. (Searle includes maxims and the like as examples of nonfictional commitments.) Others have pushed in this direction; for a sample and critique, see Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*, 18–25.

7. De Man continues: "in the *Iliad*, when we first encounter Helen, it is as the emblem of the narrator weaving the actual war into the tapestry of a fictional object. . . . The self-reflecting mirror-effect by means of which a work of fiction asserts, by its very existence, its separation from empirical reality . . . characterizes the work of literature in its essence" (*Blindness and Insight*, 170). That Greek readers of Homer—at least by the time of Aristotle, to whom I will return in a moment—felt it to be a work of poetry as opposed to history seems to me indisputable; I doubt very much that such a status was predicated on a concept of the "empirical," or an experience of the "essence" of literature.

8. "But are we quite sure we know what 'literature' means?" asks Roberto Calasso. "When we pronounce the word today, we are immediately aware that it is immeasurably distant from anything an eighteenth-century writer might have meant by it, while at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was already taking on connotations we quickly

recognize" (*Literature and the Gods*, 170). Literature's growth as a category has been analyzed by Caron, *"Belles lettres."*

9. To my knowledge the lexical drift from "fiction" as synonymous with (usually devalued) poetic fancy to designating narrative literature as such has not been precisely traced. The titles of works like Staël's *Essai sur les fictions* (1795) and Dunlop's *The History of Fiction* (1814) at least suggest that by the turn of the nineteenth century "fiction" as an umbrella term for the novel exists in both French and English. For a brief look at the word's English history, see Williams, *Keywords*, 134–35.

10. These scholars are Davis, *Factual Fictions*; Foley, *Telling the Truth*; and Gallagher, *Nobody's Story* and "Rise of Fictionality." Despite the sometimes stark disagreements that I develop below, my debt to these scholars, especially to Foley and Gallagher, is deep: they are the first to view "fiction" as a more problematic and interesting term than "the novel," and this book would not exist without their work.

11. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. For an additional philosophical-anthropological approach, see Schaeffer, *Pourquoi la fiction?* The argument from evolutionary biology is made in, e.g., Boyd, *Origin of Stories*.

12. As do Chevrolet, *Idée de fable* and Duprat, *Vraisemblances*. Richly detailed though they are, both studies take "fiction" as a historically unproblematic term.

13. See Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*. Blumenberg was countering the argument that the modern world is simply a secularized iteration of an earlier Christian world; it was, he held, legitimately new.

14. *Poetics* 9; in Russell and Winterbottom, eds., *Ancient Literary Criticism*, 102. (Further quotes in the following discussion are found here and on page 103.)

15. Wood, *How Fiction Works*, 238. Aristotelian poetry is thus understood as a hypothetical but logically coherent reality, as distinct from the purely fabulous and the historical: "Aristotle invoked, or invented, the concept of probability, in order to locate the reality of drama both beyond mere fiction and factual reality" (Pfeiffer, "Fiction," 94–95).

16. Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 195–97.

17. For "might," see Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Hutton, 54; for "could," see Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Halliwell, 40. For Aristotle's poetry as a "hypothetical" or "imaginable" reality, see Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 179, 188.

18. Halliwell, *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, 166. The interpretation of poetic generality as proto-fictional, though repeated, is not fully sustained in Halliwell's account; my reasons for disagreement will become clear. For an alternate argument that the Greeks' "poetry" had little to do with "fiction" despite occasional congruence between the two, see Gill, "Plato on Falsehood."

19. Diderot, *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*, in *Oeuvres esthétiques*, 212. "Facts" here refer to people and actions, while Diderot uses "interest" in the sense common to aesthetic theory in eighteenth-century Britain and France—emotional appeal or impact. Poetic "additions" often include invented secondary characters who enrich the plot: as I will explain in Chapter 1, the point is not that Aristotelian poetics tolerates no (or only minimal) invention of characters, but that attested events and heroes are its point of departure.

20. For a detailed consideration of the Greek novels' situation with respect to history, see Morgan, "Make-Believe," and Heiserman, *Novel Before the Novel*. Bakhtin's investment in uncovering "realistic" novelistic chronotopes leads him to emphasize the importance of works like the *Satyricon* at the expense of the "adventure-time" chronotopes of Greek novels (see *Dialogic Imagination*, 84–258). As I discuss briefly below and again at more length in Chapter 2, however, it is the latter works that had a more demonstrable influence on early European novelists, who nonetheless quickly abandoned the use of invented heroes so as to bring their creations in line with Aristotelian stipulations regarding the preeminence of historical subject matter.

21. In this vein, see Catherine Gallagher's remarks on Shakespeare: "It is difficult to say how much Shakespeare or his audience were invested in the assumption that Hamlet had been a real person, but it does seem that the playwright had a much harder time than we do imagining that tragic heroes had no prior bodily existence" ("Novel," 231n6). The gist of Gallagher's remark seems to me right, even if, as will become clear, the issue is probably not best framed as one of imaginative ability.

22. The pioneering study is Tieje, "Peculiar Phase." I will be mentioning a number of others.

23. Richardson, *Selected Letters*, 85.

24. Coleridge, *Biographia literaria*, 7. It should be noted that Coleridge, who in contradistinction to Richardson glosses this willingness as "poetic" (not historical) faith, is referring here to the reading of specifically supernatural subject matter, and not poetry about the everyday world (whose representation needs no "suspension of disbelief" at all). In other words, this famous phrase, in context, does not describe a phenomenology of reading (or of film- or theater-going) *tout court*, as is now routinely assumed. Unfortunately, many critics have rushed to use Coleridge's formula as a statement of modern fictionality, the "realization" toward which earlier thinkers were tending; among many others, see Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 347–49, and McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel*, 128, 297.

25. Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 47.

26. Burke is of course speaking of theatrical spectacle, and Richardson of the novel, but despite the qualitative difference between reading a book and seeing and hearing bodies on stage, the two types of consumption were continually conflated in the period.

27. Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 47.

28. To be precise, two meanings of the term are overlaid in Richardson's letter. When he writes of "that kind of Historical Faith which Fiction itself is generally read with," fiction seems to mean approximately "literature"; when he adds "tho' we know it to be Fiction," fiction now means something untrue, unhistorical.

29. Quoted in Reiss, "Imagining the Worst," 106–10. The Dorking episode is analyzed in Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, 27–57.

30. Balzac, *Comédie humaine*, 3: 50.

31. Balzac, *Comédie humaine*, 1: 11. As we will see in Chapter 3, manners (as opposed to, say, passions or surprising adventures) had been an object of earlier novelists, though the latter had spoken more of producing a "tableau" or "picture" than a "history."

32. Balzac, *Comédie humaine*, 1: 11.

33. Todorov and Genette, eds., *Littérature et réalité*, 7. The only essay in the collection not to take such a position is the French translation of the first chapter of Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel*.

34. Barthes, "Effet de réel," 89.

35. "In Barthes's description, reality effects are designed to create the aura of real life through their sheer meaninglessness: the barometer [Barthes's example of a superfluous object] doesn't play a role in the narrative, and it doesn't symbolize anything. It's just there for background texture, to create the illusion of a world cluttered with objects that have no narrative or symbolic meaning" (Johnson, *Everything Bad*, 78). Similarly, according to James Wood's gloss on Barthes's concept, "[realist] fiction builds into itself a lot of surplus detail just as life is full of surplus detail"; the physical appearance of a character will be described in superfluous depth because "it is just 'how he looked'" (*How Fiction Works*, 81).

36. Barthes, "Effet de réel," 89.

37. For this critique, see Tallis, *Not Saussure*, and Compagnon, *Démon de la théorie*, 141–47.

38. On the pragmatic self-refutation of the argument for reference's impossibility, see Tallis, *Not Saussure*, 59. Michel Riffaterre's essay "L'Illusion référentielle" (also reprinted in the *Littérature et réalité* collection) avoids this absurdity by restricting nonreferentiality to literary language. But now the argument becomes self-confirming, as Compagnon points out: literary language is defined as nonreferential, and manifestly referential books or parts thereof are simply denied literary standing (*Démon de la théorie*, 130–31).

39. Prendergast, *Order of Mimesis*, 70–71.

40. This implied hallucination—Prendergast's term—represents "a remarkable blind spot in the semiological approach to the question of reference" (*Order of Mimesis*, 71–72).

41. Compagnon, *Démon de la théorie*, 134. The relaxation of Barthes's iconophobia in *La Chambre claire*—where the "indexical" reality effect of the photograph is positively described—is perhaps the result of contamination with the Lacanian idea of the imaginary. See Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 437–56.

42. Barthes, "Effet de réel," 89.

43. Barthes, "Écrire," 25. Spectatorial naïveté did routinely pop up, however, in the many full-scale critiques of the realist novel appearing in the 1970s and early 1980s. The mendacity of the realist novel is driven home by Catherine Belsey with an updating of Stendhal's anecdote: "The success with which the Sherlock Holmes stories achieve an illusion of reality is repeatedly demonstrated. According to *The Times* in December 1967, letters to Sherlock Homes were still commonly addressed to 221B Baker Street, many of them asking for the Detective's help" (quoted in Tallis, *In Defence of Realism*, 153). In such attacks (of which Tallis mentions many), the self-reflexive novel emerges as the antidote, stepping in to warn readers about taking fiction for reality. (On infatuation with Sherlock Holmes as a more ironic phenomenon than Belsey thinks, see Saler, "'Clap.'")

44. Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 175.

45. "A True History" is incorporated into the title page of Behn's purportedly eyewitness account, *Oroonoko, or, The Royal Slave* (1688).

46. For instance Balzac, who like many realists had an affection for the mirror analogy, explicitly invoked Leibniz's idea of a "concentrating mirror," or *speculum concentrationis* (Balzac, *Écrits sur le roman*, 59n1).

47. Balzac, *Comédie humaine*, 1: 14.

48. My remarks on fiction's ability to make a specific type of proposition—subtle propositions that are worlds away from the naïveté lambasted by Barthes and others—are brief. For a more extensive treatment, see Foley, *Telling the Truth*, 42–63.

49. Dickens, *Hard Times*, 314.

50. Cited in Vargas Llosa, *Temptation*, 168.

51. Balzac, *Écrits sur le roman*, 83; Hugo, *Oeuvres complètes*, 14: 1254. The other quotations (made without reference to the formulations of Balzac and Hugo) are from, respectively, Furst, *All Is True*, 9, and Dubois, *Romanciers du réel*, 47. (Though both Furst and Dubois want to save realism from such accusations, they do so by balancing its mendacity against more positive characteristics; the accusations themselves are validated.)

52. For some foundational accounts in this vein, in order of initial appearance, see May, "Histoire"; Deloffre, "Problème"; Mylne, *Eighteenth-Century French Novel*; Coulet, *Roman jusqu'à la Révolution*; Showalter, *Evolution of the French Novel*; and Démoris, *Roman à la première personne*.

53. Stewart, *Imitation and Illusion*, 303. In "Rise of *I*," Stewart has substantially modified his perspective, stressing the formal importance of first-person narration in a way that is largely compatible with my understanding, developed below, of the pseudofactual novel as a technology.

54. Cohn, *Distinction of Fiction*, 3.

55. Davis, *Factual Fictions*, 156.

56. Foley, *Telling the Truth*, 145, 144.

57. Foley, *Telling the Truth*, 118, 119.

58. Foley, *Telling the Truth*, 118.

59. Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, xvi.

60. Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, 145.

61. Gallagher, "Rise of Fictionality," 344. I will return to Gallagher's account of Fielding's types in Chapter 3.

62. To be sure, the critic is careful not to suggest an instantaneous development: "there was no sudden novelistic revolution that purged English narrative of somebody [i.e., real "referents"] and replaced him or her with nobody [fictional characters]" (*Nobody's Story*, 165). To square this prudence with the idea of a "massive reorientation," perhaps Gallagher would argue that there is indeed a process, only a quick one, completed in the space of a couple of decades.

63. Foley, *Telling the Truth*, 117.

64. Montesquieu, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1: 131.

65. How Gallagher would answer such questions is unclear, partially because of the

nature of her claims and partially because her work has evolved. I've noted that *Nobody's Story* does not attempt to take the measure of pseudofactual conventions; moreover, while it suggests systematic upheaval, it consists largely of close literary readings of the themes of property and production, self-invention and naming, debt and credit, all of which are seen as (metaphorically) engaging the issue of fictionality. Gallagher's chronology also proves quite elastic, since in a third study she has suggested that it is in the nineteenth century that a general valorization of doubt (emblematized by Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism) allows novel readers to entertain propositions they do not literally believe in; at the same time, this culture of doubt (and thus fiction) is said to have its roots in *Hamlet* (Gallagher and Greenblatt, "Novel"). By this standard, like the bourgeoisie of the old joke, fiction too will always be rising.

66. Foley, *Telling the Truth*, 124; she calls the longevity of the mode "a wonder" (119). Davis remarks the "striking fact" that Richardson and other novelists "refused to concede that they were writing fictions," proposing that this may be "because fiction was too limiting a concept for them" (*Factual Fictions*, 176, 192).

67. "The convention of the claim to historicity is becoming increasingly vestigial," reads McKeon's gloss on Richardson's letter to Warburton (*Origins of the English Novel*, 414).

68. For simplicity I've focused my attention on the three scholars of the English novel who have done the most to foreground fictionality as a historical problem. I should mention a few more here, starting with Day, *From Fiction to the Novel*, who offers a capacious tour of English pseudofactuality that argues, albeit diffusely, that its strategies are an effort "to create realism" (189). (Day's vocabulary does not map onto that of most, since "fiction" in his title refers to the outright romance fancifulness that preceded "the novel.") Without foregrounding the term, Michael McKeon suggests that fiction emerges as a kind of middle way between naïve empiricism and extreme skepticism. Through a slow dialectical process, the novel teaches its readers that literature involves a special sort of credence: in language that recalls that of Davis and Foley, he writes that little by little "modern culture becomes sufficiently tolerant of artful fictions to pass beyond the bare recognition of their incredibility and to conceive the possibility of their validation in other terms" (*Origins of the English Novel*, 128). The most recent attempt to tackle the problem of the French pseudofactual is Herman, Kozul and Kremer, *Roman véritable*; the idiom here is different, since what rises is neither realism nor a kind of credence but the "legitimacy" of fiction. Finally, there are a number of studies of the eighteenth-century French and English novel's relation with history that do not foreground fictionality (or the pseudofactual) per se: Gearhart, *Open Boundary*, Ray, *Story and History*, and Zimmerman, *Boundaries of Fiction*.

69. Though I address the issue in much more depth in Chapter 2, speaking of romance here demands that I clarify my use of the word novel. Like many literary historians, I use "romance" to designate the long narratives of the French seventeenth century—works from d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1607–27) to Scudéry's *Clélie* (1654–60)—that were modeled on Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*. Unlike many, however, I treat romance as a form of the novel—a form that is morphologically distinct from the pseudofactual novel and the fictional novel. (The distinction involves not only length, but also, say, the number of characters and modes of narration; the distinction is *not* one of content or intrinsic plausibility.) I avoid, then, the historical and logical difficulties of determining just when romance becomes the novel at the same time I acknowledge the temptation—visible since the 1660s—to make the distinction. That is, there is indeed a (morphological) break between romance and the pseudofactual; but there is no break between romance and the novel. (If I could, I would reword the statement of John Mullan's I use as my epigraph: "the" novel does not arrive in the eighteenth century, only a certain identifiable form of novel.)

70. See Morgan, "Make-Believe," 177–78. (These are among the rare—and invariably derogatory—references to the writings that Bakhtin and many others view as ancestors of the modern novel.)

71. *Outillage mental* was a term coined by the pioneering historian of *mentalités* Lucien Febvre; see Chartier, "Intellectual History," 18–22.

72. Gossman, "History and Literature," 23. Gossman's contention might be better rephrased by saying that history and poetry were both co-equal branches of rhetoric, though classifications such as these were hotly contested in the Renaissance.

73. *Poetics* 9, in Russell and Winterbottom, eds., *Ancient Literary Criticism*, 102–3.

74. For the Chinese situation, for example, see Lu, *From Historicity to Fictionality*.

75. See Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, esp. 197–230.

76. Quoted in Nelson, *Fact or Fiction*, 46. Nelson bases his efficient synthesis on Weinberg, *History*, who concludes, "Most critics believe that the object [of imitation] must be a true one if credibility is to result" (1: 633). In McKeon's account of the novel, such statements are taken for signs of the inroads made by the empirical spirit. Hence, observing that references to historical truth can already be found in Renaissance romance, he declares them to be attempts by a formerly fanciful genre "to adapt to epistemological revolution and to keep itself honest" (*Origins of the English Novel*, 56). But scorn for poets who speak of people and events that never were does not make the people who deliver the scorn predecessors of Locke; they are merely good followers of Aristotelian thought about poetry. McKeon briefly denies this, arguing that such thinkers "tended to read the *Poetics* through the spectacles of empirical epistemology" (53). The contention, which is never supported, follows from the preconception that only the invisible hand of empiricism can motivate the appeal to truth.

77. Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 371.

78. Nelson calls this development a "flight from fiction," by which he means a retreat into ever more historical poses; see *Fact or Fiction*, 92–115.

79. See Heliodorus, *Histoire aethiopique*, 159–64.

80. Quoted in Esmein, ed., *Poétiques du roman*, 139–40. Their preface is often cited as a manifesto of neoclassical *vraisemblance*. Again, this was just a rationale, and some did not agree: Huet's treatise *De l'origine des romans* (1670), perhaps the best-known early history of the genre, maintains that romance protagonists do not need to be historical in the manner of tragic characters: being of middling stature, the former could not possibly have come to the attention of readers; they are *vraisemblable* in the sense that they may be assumed

to be historical (*Origine*, 445–46). This is not, however, an argument for open fictionality: as we will see in Chapter 1, the logic is still firmly Aristotelian in its postulate of historical possibility.

81. "L'esprit n'est point ému par ce qu'il ne croit pas" (*Art poétique* III, 50, in Boileau, *Oeuvres complètes*, 170). Boileau restates Horace's oft-reprised dictum of *incredulus odi*: "Whatever you thus show me, I discredit and abhor" (*Ars poetica*, in *Satires*, 466–67). "Thus" referred specifically to overly horrible events (Medea's murder of her children, the dinner Atreus makes of his brother Thyestes), but the line was widely taken as declaring the necessity of audience belief across the board, especially in the matter of supernatural phenomena.

82. On illusionism's deep roots in Aristotelian thought of the Renaissance, see Hénin, *Ut pictura theatrum*. Hénin's work demonstrates that the concern with illusion that many have viewed as typical of the Enlightenment thought about the arts and a properly modern "aesthetics" (e.g., Hobson, *Object of Art*; Marshall, *Frame of Art*) is in fact merely a development of much older commonplaces.

83. D'Argens, *Lectures amusantes*, 1: 52–53.

84. This is not to say that Aristotelian invention could not be made to serve topical ends: French neoclassical tragedy as a whole can and must be viewed in the context of pressing political questions of the day (conflicts between the aristocracy and the monarchy, problems of governance, and so on); and heroic romance allowed a writer such as Madeleine de Scudéry to offer extended instruction in aristocratic sociability at the same time she referred to heroes of the past. But I follow Foley's claim that the pseudofactual effectively expanded the reach of the novel's power to figure the contemporary world.

85. The first such narrators seem to appear in England in the late 1780s—in, say, Blower's *Maria, A Novel* (1785) and Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction* (1788). By the 1790s, a number of very different subgeneric contexts feature third-person texts having no "real world" narrator, among them Austen's novel of manners, Scott's historical novel, and Goethe's Bildungsroman; the gothic novel alternates between pseudofactual found documents and a fictional third person. Further narratological considerations will be postponed until the Conclusion.

86. Acknowledging Gallagher, Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*, has greatly expanded this line of inquiry.

87. Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction."

88. Reiss, *Discourse of Modernism*.

89. Welsh, *Strong Representations*, 44–76.

90. Liu, "Power of Formalism," 743. On the affinity in the humanities for arguments that "enchant" their object of study, see Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment*.

91. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 43. By contrast, Kantian pleasure is predicated on an object that really exists.

92. See Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 150–70. Thanks to Andrew Clark for the Benjamin analogy.

93. To an extent, this is the kind of history of the novel attempted by Franco Moretti, especially in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*. I will have occasion to allude to Moretti's findings in the course of this book, though usually because his hypotheses, couched in the Darwinian language of evolutionary biology, do not match my observations. Between what I'm calling a morphological history and Moretti's work are two major differences. First, Moretti thinks of formal innovation as a kind of gene passed down from generation to generation, whereas the technology metaphor is, I believe, much less strained. Second, though Moretti crunches an impressive amount of brute data, the way he interprets the data is very much in line with the "sociology of forms" he has advocated in the past: observed evolutions must be the epiphenomenal manifestation of factors such as the rise of the bourgeoisie or capitalist market culture. (This is particularly evident in "Style," his study of titles.)

CHAPTER 1. THE IMPOSSIBLE PRINCESS (LAFAYETTE)

Portions of this chapter appeared in "Lafayette's Impossible Princess: On (Not) Making Literary History," *PMLA* 125, 4 (2010), reprinted by permission of the copyright holder, the Modern Language Association of America.

1. Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 30. The modernity of *La Princesse de Clèves* is proverbial. For some accounts, see Stone, "Exemplary Teaching"; Prince, *Narrative as Theme* (39–50); Lyons, *Exemplum* (217–36); and Desan, "Economy of Love." For a review and critique of such arguments, see Campbell, "'Modernité.'"

2. I refer to what were known as *nouvelles historiques* as historical "novellas" rather than "novels" solely to avoid associations with later historical novels by Scott and others. By "historical romance" I designate what was called the *roman héroïque*, or, as time went on, the *vieux roman*. This distinction was generic, and was observed at the time Lafayette was writing. My use of it here does not imply that I believe that the *roman héroïque* was not a "real" novel, or that the *nouvelle historique* was. Many things separate the two forms, but from the point of view of this study both are equally far from being fiction.

3. Charnes, *Conversations*, 84–85 (citations in the text will appear with the abbreviation C). Valincour's most recent editor follows this argument; see Valincour, *Lettres*, 25–30 (henceforth abbreviated V). Assertions of Charnes's superiority on this point have become commonplace; see, e.g., Esmein, ed., *Poétiques du roman*, 632–42.

4. Valincour's criticisms are attributed in his text to different interlocutors; since we cannot know what Valincour's own opinion was, I refer to all the (sometimes contradictory) critical statements as his.

5. Seventeenth-century French romances typically had some sort of historical setting. History both gave the works a claim to moral value (Bannister, *Privileged Mortals*, 91–99) and underwrote the verisimilitude responsible for readerly pleasure: "[when] lies are made openly, such crude falsity makes no impression on the soul, and gives no pleasure," wrote Georges and Madeleine de Scudéry in the preface to their romance *Ibrahim* (1641–44; Esmein, ed., *Poétiques du roman*, 139–40). As I've noted in the Introduction, occasionally writers offered contrary opinions without developing a practice that could displace the Aristotelian model.